

A Want of News in an Occupied Zone: Newspaper Content in Occupied Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing

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A WANT FOR NEWS IN AN OCCUPIED ZONE:
NEWSPAPER CONTENT IN OCCUPIED LILLE, ROUBAIX, AND TOURCOING

by

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ABSTRACT
A WANT OF NEWS IN AN OCCUPIED ZONE:
NEWSPAPER CONTENT IN OCCUPIED LILLE, ROUBAIX, AND TOURCOING,
1914-1918

Candice Addie Quinn, B.A., M.A.

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The purpose of this dissertation is to ascertain exactly what news people in the occupied zone of France received during the First World War, in an attempt to assess the general assumption that the people of occupied France received little to no news. It is certain that the people in the occupied cities of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing received less news than before the occupation, and most of the news they did receive came from an untrusted source, namely the German occupiers. However, research for this dissertation reveals that the cities at the urban heart of northern France, Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, received more news than historians previously have believed. Research for this dissertation comprised of reviewing all the sources available in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing during the occupation, which included German-controlled newspapers produced in France and Belgium, a short-lived clandestine press, and newspapers published outside the occupied zone covertly imported into the cities.

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Introduction

Consistent receipt of news from a trusted media source plays a vital role in the modern consciousness of western societies. People have a need for news, that is, a composite, shared, ordered, and edited product, informing them in a timely manner about current events.¹ This was no less true for the people of occupied northern France during the First World War, who for four years suffered German occupation and isolation from their own country. Despite the numerous physical hardships they endured under occupation, including food shortages and forced labor, history remembers the lack of news as one of the greatest deprivations the people of occupied northern France underwent. Very nearly every historical work that examines the experiences of northern France agrees with Deborah Buffton's assertion, "It was the lack of information that was perhaps the hardest thing to bear during the war and occupation."² The purpose of this dissertation is to ascertain exactly what news people in the occupied zone received, in an attempt to assess the general assumption that the people of occupied France received little to no news. It is certain that the people in the occupied cities of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing received less news than before the occupation, and most of the news they did receive came from an untrusted source, namely the German occupiers. However, research for this dissertation reveals that the cities at the urban heart of northern France, Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, received more news than historians previously have believed.

Our concentration on the flow of news in no way diminishes the dreadfulness of life under occupation. Northern France became a virtual German colony, governed by a

¹ Michael Schudson, *The Power of News* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 3.

² Deborah Buffton, *The Ritual of Surrender: Northern France under Two Occupations, 1914-1918, 1940-1944* (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987), 39.

regime aimed at economic extraction rather the production.³ Leonard Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker aptly describe the horrors of life under German occupation. They note, “The paradigm of imposed brutality adhered to the true meaning of terrorism, designed to humiliate and thus dominate the civilian population by keeping it in a state of shock through the systematic use of emergency regulations and violence.”⁴ The Germans, they further state, employed “...[a]ncient practices of extraction and slavery... administered through the most modern bureaucratic techniques of coercion.”⁵ A central component of this system of domination was a control over the flow of information. The position of occupied France behind the German trenches gave the Germans dominion over the transmission of information. To make their monopoly greater, they quickly issued restrictive measures forbidding the publication of any material without their prior reading, as the Fourth Convention of The Hague allows in occupied zones during war.⁶ The Germans immediately banned the publication of any newspapers without their approval and all French newspapers disappeared. The Oberste Heersleitung’s (OHL) order pertaining to the publishing and distributing of news appeared in the *Bulletin de Lille* in May 1915, as the activities of the clandestine press motivated the German occupiers to reiterate their publication rules. Article one of the order stated that all printed material must be submitted to the German censor, and article two noted that reproduction and publication of any written material could not be done until signed by the censor. Article three stated that a free copy of every issue had to be

³ Leonard Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶ Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 79.

submitted to the censor after it was printed.⁷ Article four stated that everything submitted to the censor must be identified with the name and address of the printer or editor.

Article five of the order forbid having in one's possession imported newspapers.⁸

The Germans did not limit their control to public media, but brought private communication under their eye as well. They only allowed personal letters in a limited form, sent unsealed to allow censor supervision. The German occupiers confiscated almost all private and public telephones and all radios and outlawed the keeping of pigeons, which they feared could carry messages back and forth to unoccupied France. For urban populations habituated to having multiple local, national, and international newspapers at their disposal, the limitations placed upon their consumption of information was greatly discombobulating.

This dissertation is an act of historical reconstruction, aimed at revealing what information was available through newspapers in the Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing region during the occupation. Paul Connerton writes that historical reconstruction is still necessary even if the social memory preserves direct testimony.⁹ The social memories of survivors of the occupation, displayed in numerous sources, long have asserted the absolute lack of news in occupied France. Yet, Connerton urges us to question such memories. He continues on to note, "Historians do not continue to question the statements of their informants because they think that the informants want to deceive them or have themselves been deceived. Historians continue to question the statements of their informants because if they were to accept them at face value that would amount to

⁷ *Bulletin de Lille*, May 30, 1915.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14.

abandoning their autonomy as practicing historians.”¹⁰ Such an historical questioning as urged by Connerton will reveal that there was not a complete lack of news. Survivors’ memories may have been shaped by their juxtaposition of the wartime news they received with the information they had access to before the war. Combined with the direness of their situation under occupation and the painfulness of the uncertainty surrounding their future, the people of occupied France may have created a collective memory that they received less news than appears to be the case after looking at their media sources.

The German-controlled press was the single greatest source of news in the occupied zone, comprising newspapers published in Lille and Roubaix, and papers originating in other areas of occupied France and occupied Belgium. This was the only media allowed by the German occupiers, but the area did manage slightly more press diversity than the Germans intended. Outdated Parisian newspapers appeared irregularly in the region, either smuggled in or dropped from airplanes. Newspapers recorded reaching the occupied zone include issues of *Matin*, *l’Echo de Paris*, and *Petit Journal*. Dutch, English, and clandestine Belgian papers were also infrequently available on the black market, as well. A clandestine press also published within the confines of the occupied zone, with at least such eight newspapers appearing in Lille alone between January 1915 and December 1916.¹¹ The French government also made some rather anemic attempts at influencing people through newspapers in the occupied zone. The French army was in charge of propaganda directed at French territories occupied by the Germans. The Section de la propagande aérienne dropped forged German newspapers

¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹ Buffton, 117.

meant to demoralize the occupiers and French newspapers meant to raise the morale of the French population.¹² French people trusted these sources, but they were infrequent and outdated. The German-controlled press, while biased and chocked full of propaganda, was regularly available and provided a surprisingly substantial amount of war information.

The first three chapters of this dissertation provide the background necessary to understanding the environment and context in which the people of occupied France received news. The first chapter will examine life in metropolitan northern France before the war. For a successful reconstruction of news dissemination, one needs to know the receiver. This chapter will allow for a better understanding of the people receiving the news and why they believed they received such little information under the German occupation. This view examines the physical layout of the cities, and the economic and social make-up of the tri-city area, including the living and working conditions, language usage, political and religious trends, and the pre-war newspapers available in the area. The second chapter provides an overview of German occupation of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing. This will supply the context within which the occupied people received information via newspapers and why they were so unreceptive to news from German sources. This overview includes a look at the invasion and capture of the three cities, as well as the German administration and economic exploitation of the area, including the ensuing food shortages. To better understand the relationship between occupier and occupied, it shall examine the French resistance to occupation and the German response.

¹² Andreas Laska, *Presse et propagande allemandes en France occupée: des Moniteurs officiels (1870-1871) à la Gazette des Ardennes (1914-1918) à la Pariser Zeitung (1940-1944)* (Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2003), 109.

The third chapter briefly discusses news coverage in unoccupied France and Germany, to demonstrate how the warring powers cast the news received in occupied France. This chapter reviews how the French and German governments availed themselves of their nations' presses to influence their people to support the war. A *Chicago Tribune* reporter noted during the war that, "The most serious and the most disheartening thing about this war... is the strict censorship which will lie in the face of overwhelming defeat as well as exaggerate the importance of a minor victory... The papers print only what the ministry dictates, and they all print the same thing."¹³ This quotation referred to the French press and people, but was also applicable to the Germans. Almost all newspapers in warring nations contained propaganda and faced censorships; what made the lot of occupied French people more painful was that they were exposed to propaganda and censorship controlled by the enemy rather than their own nation.

Chapters four through eleven of this dissertation dissect the German-controlled sources of information available to the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing. The agenda of all the newspapers in this category was to terrify the population and create a defeatist mentality among the occupied French people. The aim was discouragement. Realistically, the German-occupiers knew they would not turn the populace to their side, but they could hope to create a dislike for the Allies, in particular the British, and a desire for peace under any terms. The German-controlled papers obviously had an agenda that distorted much of the news, but that agenda was clear to the audience. This was an intelligent audience aware of the occupiers' aims, and hence they had the ability to a

¹³ Carolyn Wilson, "People of Paris are Victims of Censorship," in *Under Siege: Portraits of Civilian Life in France during World War I*, Robert J. Young, ed. (London: Berghahn Books, 2000), 11.

certain extent to screen out the propaganda and extract the nugget of news it was enveloping. An extraction process – or seeing beyond the propaganda – was made easier by the fact that German propaganda was not that well crafted. It was obvious and heavy-handed, as we will see in analyzing German-dominated newspapers. Thus, the fourth chapter of this work looks at the *Bulletin de Lille* and fifth chapter studies the *Bulletin de Roubaix*. These two regional newspapers played the distinctive and important role of supplying their communities with local news and information, while continuing to instill fear and a defeatist attitude. *La Gazette des Ardennes* is the focus of the sixth chapter. The next three chapters examine the three newspapers imported from German-occupied Belgium. Under the control of a different censorship bureaucracy, the Belgian newspapers in general provided more information and a tad less propaganda than those produced in occupied France. Chapter seven looks at *La Belgique* and chapter eight at *Le Bien Public*. These two newspapers were available only briefly in occupied France, until February 1915. The Germans imported these two newspapers only temporarily because, despite being under the control of a German censor, the staff of these two papers allowed points of view and information that the Germans did not relish into their papers. However, the subject of chapter nine, *Le Bruxellois*, was a newspaper available throughout most of the occupation, because of its staff's willingness to follow German publication orders. These newspapers are at the heart of this dissertation, as the fact that these newspapers reached occupied France is hardly remembered.

Chapters ten and eleven of this dissertation examine the clandestine press and less influential sources of news. Chapter ten details the short-lived clandestine press, which for a brief period of time was the only truly trusted source of information for a fortunate

few in the occupied cities. While short-lived and only reaching a small portion of people, the existence of newspapers untainted by German meddling was as important as the actual information they contained. Finally, chapter eleven provides a rundown of the other sources available to the readers of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing that the people did not read as regularly, for various reasons. This category includes smuggled-in newspapers, in whose case the difficulty and danger involved with attaining the newspapers made them a relative rarity. Another infrequent but cherished news source were newspapers produced in France and England for the occupied territory. The German passion for intercepting these papers and the need for good weather to drop them made them an infrequent source. German language newspapers were easy to attain but few Frenchmen in these cities could read German, and these newspapers only provided more news from the German perspective, hence their lack of popularity. Finally, while the focus of this dissertation is newspapers, it is worthwhile to briefly mention the books and pamphlets the Germans tried to sell to the French people. Not surprisingly, these books were not too popular, as again, they promoted German righteousness and greatness.

This dissertation is the product of a great deal of help from multiple sources. I would like to thank the staff of the five archives that graciously allowed me to consult their collections. These archives are the American Naval Historical Center, the University of Minnesota archives at the Anderson Library, the Archives Departamentales du Nord in Lille, the Royal Library of Belgium, and the Widener Library at Harvard University. I would like to thank the Marquette University Graduate School for its support in the form of an Arthur J. Schmitt Fellowship, as well as research and teaching assistantships, which

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Chapter One:

The People of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing

Félix-Paul Codaccioni opens his work, *De l'inégalité sociale dans une grande ville industrielle: Le drame de Lille de 1850 à 1914* by noting that Lille could be the symbol for inequality created by nineteenth-century industrial expansion.¹ Nothing defined life prior to the war in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing more than the presence of a large worker population. The industrial era transformed this area, bringing great wealth and comfort to a few, but a hard life of toil and near-poverty to many. To understand the people of this area, this chapter begins with an examination of the physical layout of these three cities in the Département du Nord. Then it examines the economic and social makeup of the tri-city area in the years leading up to war. This summary of pre-war conditions will conclude with an overview of the people of the area, including such features as living and working conditions, language, available newspapers, political, and religious trends.

Physical Layout

Louis Trenard describes the Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing area of the First World War era as a polynuclear conurbation, with Lille being the biggest city but with the majority of the area's population living outside Lille.² Lille is in the Département du Nord, situated on the Deûle River, near France's border with Belgium. Roubaix is six miles northeast of Lille, on the Canal de Roubaix and one mile from the Belgian border, with Tourcoing

¹ Félix-Paul Codaccioni, *De l'inégalité sociale dans une grande ville industrielle: Le drame de Lille de 1850 à 1914* (Lille: Université de Lille III Éditions universitaires, 1976), 1.

² Louis Trenard, ed., *Histoire d'une métropole* (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1977), 5.

touching Roubaix to the north. Historically, the Département du Nord was part of the old counties of Hainaut and Flanders, both dating back to the ninth century. The area became a part of France during the late seventeenth century under Louis XIV. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, rapid industrialization forged Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing into an unbroken urban sprawl. The area represented an exceptional level of urbanization for France during this period.³ However, the three cities' histories varied, and all three preserved some unique characteristics, representative of their different pasts.

Before Lille was a manufacturing town, it was a port settlement on an important northern river, a key link in European trade for almost a thousand years. It conducted most of this international trade with Belgium. Lille, moreover, was a city dating back to medieval times, unlike Roubaix and Tourcoing that remained small villages into the nineteenth century. It swiftly went from a trading hub with a blossoming commercial center to a large industrial city. This development of industry fuelled a surge in population, due to the high birthrate of nineteenth-century workers, immigration from Belgium, and Lille's annexation of neighboring towns.⁴ Despite this growth, much of Lille retained a medieval aspect that was in place during the First World War. The center of the city lay around the historic Grand' Place, which is still the heart of the business district. To the east of the Grand' Place, were the Saint-Maurice and Saint-Sauveur neighborhoods, notable for numerous factories and busy streets. While many workers lived in Saint-Maurice and Saint-Sauveur, a middle-class element also called these neighborhoods home. The upper class lived to the west and north of the Grand' Place, in

³ Patricia Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France, 1880-1914: A Regional Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 9.

⁴ Ibid.

beautiful neighborhoods made up of the homes of the bourgeoisie and upscale hotels.⁵ Most of the mills sat on the outskirts of town, allowing the heart of the city to retain its medieval character. Also north and west of the Grand' Place was the citadel designed by Vauban. The citadel made Lille one of the keys to France's national defense, and added a concentration of armed forces to the city's makeup. During the Second Empire Lille underwent the same urban revolution as Paris, as a series of gigantic public works, including the development of parks near the citadel and the widening major thoroughfares, transformed the city, at least in its wealthier center.⁶

Unlike Lille, which had been an urban center for centuries, both Roubaix and Tourcoing remained very rural in character well into the nineteenth century. Roubaix's lack of growth stemmed from its isolation from the important national commercial channels. Instead, it grew slowly as a small town, on the left bank of the small Trichon River, located at the intersection of local roads. Patricia Hilden describes Roubaix as "a city without a past,"⁷ although in truth, as early as the seventeenth century people began weaving luxury cloth in a few scattered cottages. The village carried on this way for two hundred years, but factory production of cloth overwhelmed the traditional economy around 1850.⁸ As industrialists built factories, they gave little regard to the layout of the existing village. Segregation of the rich and poor did not occur in Roubaix as in Lille; rather workers' slums surrounded the small brick homes of white-collar employees and the ornate mansions of the bourgeoisie, allowing for daily confirmation of the stark

⁵ Trenard, *Histoire d'une métropole*, 319.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 366.

⁷ Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*

contrast between rich and poor.⁹ Sadly, a lack of thought and rapid growth caused Roubaix to lose all vestiges of its rural character. This early form of urban sprawl absorbed small neighboring villages, such as Wattrelos, “transforming them into squalid terraced housing for Roubaix’s growing textile workforce.”¹⁰

Unlike Roubaix, Tourcoing managed to retain much of its medieval town character. As in Lille, industrialists built their mills and factories on the open land that encircled the city, leaving the heart of the city unscathed. Despite differences, both Roubaix and Tourcoing quickly became part of a conurbation centered on Lille. Railway trains and trams connected the three cities during the second half of the nineteenth century. Trams in particular provided a relatively cheap mode of transportation, and slightly better off workers utilized them to expand the physical area in which to look for jobs.¹¹

The Economy

These three cities formed one great industrial center prior to World War I. Economic growth accelerated quickly in this urban region. Beginning in 1810, the area transitioned to industrial capitalism, fuelled by small textile and manufacturing workshops.¹² The tri-city region was a great industrial center by the mid-nineteenth century, based on chemical manufacturing, metalwork, and, most importantly, textile production. By the twentieth century Roubaix and Tourcoing focused upon the wool

⁹ Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹² Stéphane Gerson, *The Pride of Place: Local Memories and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 17.

industry, while Lille became a center of cotton and linen production.¹³ According to the 1911 census, 25 percent of France's textile workers worked in the Département du Nord. Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing were the heart of French textile production: woven in the conurbation was 60 percent of the nation's cotton textiles, 80 percent of its woolen cloth, and most of its linen.¹⁴ The *Michelin Illustrated Guide to Lille Before and During the War* noted that the Lille region, called the "Key to France's Treasure-House," also contained the country's richest coalfields.¹⁵ Indeed, coal production and related metals trades were a second cornerstone of the economy of the Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing region, which before the war accounted for 53 percent of the France's coal production, 64 percent of its pig iron, and 62 percent of its steel.¹⁶

Lille's regional economic dominance was uncontested. By 1821, forty-three cotton factories in Lille employed almost 30,000 workers.¹⁷ By this time Lille was the premier linen producing area in France, and one of the most important in all of Europe. Receiving a boon from the cotton famine of 1861-1865, linen production continued to grow in Lille thanks to the city's tradition of textile work, the number of workers available, its proximity to the Belgian border, an infrastructure that allowed easy transportation of goods, an abundance of capital for investment, and the dynamism of local industry owners.¹⁸ Beyond this, the city enjoyed a plethora of other industries, including food processing, woodworking and furniture manufacturing, soap production,

¹³ Philippe Marchand, *Histoire de Lille* (Lille: Jean-Paul Gisserot, 2003), 84.

¹⁴ Herbert Adams Gibbons, *France and Ourselves: Interpretative Studies, 1917-1919* (New York: The Century Co. 1920), 198 and Albert Aftalion, "The Effect of the War Upon the French Textile Industry," in *Effect of the War upon French Economic Life: A Collection of Five Monographs*, Charles Gide, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 37-72.

¹⁵ *Lille Before and During the War: Michelin Illustrated Guides to the Battlefields (1914-1918)* (Paris: Michelin et Cie, Clermont-Ferrand, 1919), 3.

¹⁶ Tom Kemp, *The French Economy 1913-1919: The History of a Decline* (London: Longman, 1972), 31.

¹⁷ Trenard, *Histoire d'une métropole*, 319.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 352.

leather production, the processing of building materials, and porcelain production.¹⁹ A key industry for the city was non-heavy metal works, with the sector's most important company, Compagnie de Fives-Lille, founded in 1861.²⁰ Beyond this, Lille was a major banking and commercial center. By the end of the nineteenth century, Lille developed important banking and service industries. The city was home to 80 percent of the area's transport services, 68 percent banking and economic services, 70 percent of the public services, and 66 percent of the commercial services.²¹ Between 1850 and 1914 Lille's total wealth rose by 383 percent as its population reached 218,000 people. Another indicator of wealth: deceased *Lillois* left assets of 344 million francs in 1908-1910, as compared to 72 million francs in 1856-1858.²² Lille was also the university capital of the entire northern region of France, adding thousands of academics to the workforce. All this made Lille the de facto capital of northern France.

By 1875, Roubaix and Tourcoing were the center of a wool empire, a fact made possible by improved communication channels, including roads and tramways, and a strong pride in the area's tradition of producing fine materials, combined with knowledge of advanced production techniques.²³ Félix-Paul Codaccioni describes Roubaix's growth during the second half of the nineteenth century as a "miracle." In 1851 the city had grown to 35,000 people; by 1861, 50,000 people, and by 1900, it had 125,000 occupants.²⁴ Tourcoing's population also grew, from 28,000 people in 1851 to 85,000 in 1911. While tripling the population in sixty years represents amazing growth, Belgian

¹⁹ Trenard, *Histoire d'une métropole*, 319.

²⁰ Non-heavy metals are most metals other than cadmium, chromium, copper, iron, mercury, nickel, manganese, lead, zinc, arsenic, or selenium. Compagnie de Fives-Lille specialized in the construction of steam locomotives at that time.

²¹ Trenard, *Histoire d'une métropole*, 368.

²² *Ibid.*, 370.

²³ *Ibid.*, 348.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 360-1.

workers, who utilized the development of the tramways to travel daily to work in Tourcoing, and then return to their homes in Belgium, lessened the city's potential growth. The region's transport network allowed many Belgian workers to profit from the relatively higher wages available to workers in France and the lower cost of living in Belgium.²⁵ Unlike in Lille and Roubaix, factory production of textiles by largely unskilled labor did not immediately dominate Tourcoing's economy. Rather, the small town continued to support a class of skilled wool spinners and weavers.²⁶ A bustling smuggling trade from Belgium also gave Tourcoing's economy a unique aspect.

The industrial and urbanization trends that defined Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing during the first half of the nineteenth century continued up until the outbreak of the First World War. Textile activity gained such momentum that the area became one of the leading textile manufacturing areas in the world.²⁷ The industrial character of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing created a small wealthy elite, a moderate sized middle class, and an enormous working class that accounted for most of the population. Even before the German occupation, the majority of northern France's urban population lived in dire straits. Philippe Marchand describes Lille on the cusp of the First World War as a "city of workshops and workers."²⁸

Societal Trends

Two important societal trends were the population boom, born of an influx of immigrants and high birthrates, and the uneven distribution of wealth. Both directly

²⁵ Ibid., 362.

²⁶ Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 14.

²⁷ Trenard, *Histoire d'une métropole*, 347.

²⁸ "...Lille est une ville d'ateliers et d'usine." Marchand, 2003, 85.

related to the area's industrial nature. Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing all assimilated large immigrant populations from Flemish Belgium. By 1875, approximately half the population of Roubaix was either Belgian or of Belgian descent.²⁹ Lille also experienced an influx of people beyond that from Belgium, including transplants from the rest of France. By 1872, 30 percent of the city's population was born in a department other than the Nord.³⁰ In 1889, France passed a law encouraging foreign settlers to take French citizenship in an attempt to increase military conscripts. Belgians in the Département du Nord did so in high numbers.³¹ However, this did little to abate French xenophobia; Belgians continued to be scapegoats for native workers' anger at unemployment, working conditions, and low pay. An interesting side effect was that local xenophobia seems to have trumped traditional French misogyny; little animosity developed between the sexes in northern France as Belgians were always the focus of disdain.³² Immigration helped fuel the population boom that accounted for much of the misery of the working class by creating a plentiful labor supply that helped hold down wages. A high birthrate was the other main factor adding to the population explosion. The tri-city area had 41.54 births per 1,000 people in 1870, as compared to 25.9 births per 1,000 for the whole of France.³³ While this number began to decline towards the end of the nineteenth century, and by 1908 it was down to 25.2 births per 1,000 people, a high birthrate had already ensured overcrowding in the poorest areas of the cities.

²⁹ Joan E. Gross, "Transformations of a Popular Culture Form in Northern France and Belgium," *Anthropological Quarterly* 60 (April 1987): 71.

³⁰ Trenard, *Histoire d'une métropole*, 369.

³¹ Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 19.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 20.

As stated earlier, Lille was a wealthy city as it entered the twentieth century. However, that wealth was not distributed evenly. Félix-Paul Codaccioni notes, “in this regard, an organic inequality reigned unchallenged in the capital of Flanders, and nothing is more representative of a deep split of the three social components of tryptic Lille, with its dominating managerial class, its working class that was overwhelmed with misery, and its paradoxical and disengaged middle class.”³⁴ The upper echelons of Lille society, which included industry owners, those in the liberal professions, and high-level civil servants, comprised 9.21 percent of the population, but possessed 92.9 percent of the city’s wealth. Interestingly, wealth was not the only element that distinguished the upper reaches of Lillois society. The industrial haute bourgeoisie was a close-knitted stratum of society, and very few examples exist of social ascension into this level of Lille society prior to the First World War. Families kept large businesses within the family, oftentimes via marriage between cousins, such as with the Motte-Motte marriage in Lille and the Delannay-Delannay marriage in Tourcoing. Each son usually expected to receive his own factory. This upper class truly only respected one profession: business owner.³⁵ Their class believed in not only this dynastic conception of business, but also a complete identification of family interests with those of the company; business, religion and family were the trinity that defined them.³⁶ This group set itself off residentially too, by its congregation in Old Lille, surrounding the rue Royale.³⁷

³⁴ “A ce regard, une inégalité organique règne sans partage dans la capitale des Flandres, et rien n’est plus représentatif d’une profonde déchirure sociale que les trois volets du tryptique lillois, avec ses classes dirigeantes dominatrices, ses classes populaires écrasées de misère, ses classes moyennes paradoxales et déconcertantes.” Trenard, *Histoire d’un métropole*, 370.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 330.

³⁶ Jean-Marie Mayeur and Madeline Reberieux, *The Third Republic from its Origins to the Great War, 1871-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 67.

³⁷ Trenard, *Histoire d’un métropole*, 374.

The working class, composed of manual laborers in the factories, domestic workers, and those with miscellaneous occupations, comprised 67.5 percent of the population in 1872, and 60 percent of the population in 1911. They held less than 1 percent of the wealth.³⁸ Towards the end of the nineteenth-century approximately 65 percent of Lillois had no property to leave heirs when they died.³⁹ The number of working class people dropped slightly as Lille became less industrial and it developed secondary sectors (like banking) that created a petite bourgeoisie.⁴⁰ Between the suffering of the working class and the luxury enjoyed by the upper classes, Lille developed a middle-class, largely composed of mid-level civil servants and service industry workers. By 1890, this group made up 27 percent of Lille's population and held just over 9 percent of the wealth. Nevertheless, Félix-Paul Codaccioni declares with certainty that social inequality pervaded life in Lille.⁴¹ That social inequality was even more pronounced in Roubaix and Tourcoing, where the social structure was less complex. These two cities had a larger worker class, and a much smaller middle-class due to the lack of service and banking industries. As the First World War approached, however, even the lives of the working class were slowly improving, often thanks to socialist political gains discussed later in this chapter. These gains are not to be exaggerated; they simply meant not every worker's life was constant misery.

³⁸ Marchand, *Histoire de Lille*, 86.

³⁹ Andrew Lees and Lynn Hollen Lees, *Cities and the Making of Modern Europe, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 153.

⁴⁰ Trenard, *Histoire d'une métropole*, 375.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 380.

Living and Working Conditions

Working conditions in factories varied greatly according to duties. Workrooms could range from extremely unhealthful to well ventilated, and tasks from safe to extremely dangerous. However, in almost every case, adversity and harsh conditions characterized the experiences of most textile workers.⁴² The monotony and long hours workers endured physically and emotionally drained most of them. In mid-nineteenth century northern France, the working-day in cotton mills ranged from fifteen to seventeen hours, and one investigator asserted that some male workers occasionally worked twenty-fours at a stretch.⁴³ The factory workforce was nearly half female.⁴⁴ They earned lower wages for doing the exact same work as their male counterparts. Relief from such toil came late in life. People worked until an advanced age; one quarter of workers in the thread industry were over fifty years old.⁴⁵

Many workers blamed poor working conditions and low pay upon the immigrant population rather than on industry owners. Manual laborers from Flemish Belgium were expert workers, willing to accept almost any salary that kept them alive. Their employment lowered wages, and hence they experienced some xenophobic responses to their presence in the workforce.⁴⁶ The inadequacy of workers' wages, the unhealthful conditions they often worked in, and the squalid quarters they could afford to inhabit severely limited both the quality of life and lifespan of most workers. A charity worker

⁴² Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 89.

⁴³ Parker Thomas Moon, *The Labor Problem and the Social Catholic Movement in France: A Study in the History of Social Politics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 7.

⁴⁴ Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 3.

⁴⁵ Trenard, *Histoire d'une métropole*, 335-6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 336.

visiting a Lille slum just prior to the war commented that Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing were “waiting rooms for the dead.”⁴⁷

Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing faced enormous housing problems. Like purchasing food, rent was a colossal burden for most workers in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing. With average wages of two francs a day for a man and one franc a day for a woman, bread costing fifty-two centimes a kilo in 1847 represented a huge portion of a person’s salary.⁴⁸ In 1843 Lille a single room cost six to seven francs per month and a cellar room six francs; this cost represented a week’s wage for the lowest paid textile workers.⁴⁹ Frequently every family had to work to be able to afford one or two rooms. By the 1880s, squalid housing for the cities’ workers scarred the cities. The working class living in dank cellars and extremely crowded tenements had an exceptionally high fertility rate, bucking the general French decline. Without adequate sanitation, working class neighborhoods were incubators for diseases, hence residents also suffered a high rate of infant mortality.⁵⁰ The Lille neighborhoods of Wazemmes, Moulins-Lille, Saint-Sauveur, and Fives were enclaves of poverty where the working class lived. Incredible population density, as people lived in very tight quarters, characterized these areas.⁵¹ A housing survey in 1911 found that 32,442 Lillois living in homes with less than one-quarter of a room per person. A further 69,925 lived in homes with more than one-half

⁴⁷ “foyers de la mort.” Patrica Hilden, “Class and Gender: Conflicting Components of Women’s Behaviour in the Textile Mills of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, 1880-1914,” *The Historical Journal* 27, 2 (June 1984): 369.

⁴⁸ Moon, 7 and James Garvin Chastain et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of 1848 Revolutions* (Columbus, Ohio: University of Ohio, 1997), www.cats.ohiou.edu. Helen McPhail notes that before the war, the average adult in Lille consumed 600 grams of bread a day. Helen McPhail, *The Long Silence: Life under the German Occupation of Northern France, 1914-1918* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1999), 58.

⁴⁹ Roger Price, *A Social History of Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987), 56.

⁵⁰ Patrick Hutton, ed., *Historical Dictionary of the Third French Republic, 1870-1940* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 1: 557, 794.

⁵¹ Trenard, *Histoire d’une métropole*. 377.

but less than one room per person. In Roubaix, 4,288 people lived in less than a quarter of a room, and 29,555 people live in just over one-half a room each.⁵² Nothing was done to alleviate the misery, and, particularly in Roubaix, speculators built more and more *courées* (tall buildings built around a small courtyard that could house thousands of workers in a very small space) at low cost for high profits.⁵³ Patricia Hilden speculates that perhaps textile owners and authorities, stunned by the rapidity of social change, felt too overwhelmed to take action.⁵⁴ Even if workers could afford the higher-rents of nicer neighborhoods, for reasons of prestige and fearing “the rapid deterioration of property associated with overcrowding,” owners preferred to rent to middle-class tenants.⁵⁵ Hence, a situation that began as appalling squalor in the 1880s worsened over the next thirty-four years.

Such misery afforded workers few recreational activities. One of the few luxuries the working class indulged in was having a drink at the local *estaminet*. *Estaminet*, a word of Walloon origin, encompasses cabarets, cafés, inns, taverns, and bars. In his short history of *estaminets*, Jacques Messiant writes that the history of northern France cannot be told without including them. Indeed, the workers of these three cities possessed a historical tradition from French Flanders, which concentrated upon communal life, social activity, and a love of drinking establishments.⁵⁶ *Estaminets* helped characterize the urban landscape; in most working-class neighborhoods, there could be one or two per block. Defined as an “assembly of smokers and drinkers,” these establishments were the

⁵² Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 25-7.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁵ Price, 58.

⁵⁶ Robert Baker, “Socialism in the Nord, 1880-1914: A Regional View of the French Socialist Movement,” *International Review of Social History* 12 (1967): 359.

bastions that kept oral traditions alive and provided peace and repose for the lower classes.⁵⁷ At the 1912 Conference of the French Socialists (SFIO), Jules Guesde contended that *cafés* provided a refuge for the working class.⁵⁸ *Estaminets* prior to World War I were places workers came to “listen” to the newspaper and hold political meetings. Local leaders of the socialist movement that swept much of northern France before the war planned in bars and *cafés*. *Estaminets* also provided a refuge from the overbearing industrial leaders, priests, nuns, and police, who believed it their duty to check up upon workers, including in their homes.⁵⁹ In areas where living space was extremely limited, these taverns became communal living rooms, in which alcohol was an escape that deadened the effects of the new industrial discipline of the time clock and production lines. Of course these bastions of enjoyment did nothing to help the cycle of poverty and debt that characterized the lives of most industrial workers. The social problems of alcohol abuse were legion, including domestic abuse, male-on-male violence, absenteeism from work, and the misuse of money needed for food. While the Northern department had one of France’s lowest murder rates, “cabaret murders” – or murders connected to alcohol consumption in *estaminets* were an acknowledged occurrence. Anne Parella notes that after the 1870s, drinking establishments became a place to bury one’s troubles without being disturbed, and barkeeps and patrons did not tolerate disorderly people. Hence the type of murders connected to *estaminets* occurred against a spouse or

⁵⁷ “assemblée de fumeurs et de buveurs.” Jacques Messiant, *Estaminets du Nord: Salons du Peuple* (Lille: La Voix du Nord, 2004), 3-6.

⁵⁸ W. Scott Haine, *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 13.

⁵⁹ Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 30.

other intimate, with a prior situation worsened by alcohol, rather than murder of a stranger resulting from rowdiness taken too far.⁶⁰

While it was culturally acceptable for women and even children to visit *estaminets*, working women's dual role of employment outside the home and continued responsibilities for domestic chores, meant that drinking places were primarily the domain of men, with women making fewer and much shorter visits,⁶¹ and it was almost always the fathers and husbands who over drank. Many did drink wine or beer, but the potentially lethal absinthe was still legal and a popular drink. The role of the *estaminet* as a working class living room meant that children also frequented such places in the company of parents. Children's cries, often fuelled by exhaustion and hunger, were quieted with laudanum, an opium based drug, purchased from the bartenders.

Singing songs was a form of entertainment that cost little to no money that many workers enjoyed. In his work, *Chantier pour survivre: Culture ouvrière, travail technique dans le textile Roubaix*, Laurent Marty examines the lives of Roubaix textile workers through their culture of song writing and singing.⁶² Songs sung in the *estaminets* and homes of Roubaix workers revealed little pleasure in their work or pride in their skills, as machines now provided the expertise in preparing textiles. Rather, songs frequently described the factory as a prison and workers as convicts allowed only a few hours a week to meet friends and play billiards at the local *estaminets* for relief.⁶³ These songs, whose working-class composers were frequently socialist in leaning, told of hostility

⁶⁰ Anne Parella, "Industrialization and Murder: Northern France, 1815-1909," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22 (1992): 632-44.

⁶¹ Hilden, "Class and Gender," 367.

⁶² Laurent Marty, *Chantier pour survivre: culture ouvrière, travail technique dans le textile Roubaix* (Lille: Fédération Léo Lagrange, 1982).

⁶³ Roger Magraw, *France 1800-1914: A Social History* (London: Pearson Education, 2002), 106.

towards Roman Catholic charities, whose true aim was to control every aspect of their lives, and disillusionment with the Republic that had once promised so much. Songs were usually male and misogynistic, but they also displayed a fierce form of “frontier” patriotism, that at best revealed great pride in the French nation, and at worst deteriorated into anti-Belgian xenophobia.⁶⁴

Sports were another form of recreation available to some workers. Large employers attempted to strengthen company loyalty by subsidizing (male) workers’ football teams.⁶⁵ Workers also followed the Easter Paris-Roubaix bicycle race with great interest, and one could imagine it was frequently a topic of conversation in the *estaminets*. Newspapers allowed workers to follow sporting events occurring throughout France at little cost.

Newspapers

A “city of readers” is how many people described Lille prior to the war. By 1914, thanks to the Ferry school laws, almost all adults were literate, including those of the working class. By 1910, the city had fifty-five libraries, including its municipal library, which possessed over 96,000 titles. Before 1914, Lille enjoyed six daily newspapers, and a number of weekly papers. The larger Lille agglomeration had fourteen newspapers in 1884 and twenty-one papers in 1914.⁶⁶ By 1903 there were ninety-eight different locations in the city where one could purchase a newspaper.⁶⁷ Being informed was a way of life. As in the rest of France, none of the newspapers available in Lille, Roubaix, and

⁶⁴ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 97.

⁶⁶ Claude Bellanger, Jacques Godechot, Pierre Guirals, and Fernand Terrou. *Histoire générale de la presse française, Tome III: De 1871 à 1940* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1972), 403.

⁶⁷ Marchand, *Histoire de Lille*, 88-9.

Tourcoing were unbiased – newspapers had a clear point of view. The majority of newspapers were political in nature.

Several Catholic newspapers published in the area, including *la Vraie France*, *le Nord hebdomadaire*, *le Propagateur*, and *La Croix du Nord*, which became a daily in 1890 under Paul-Féron Vrau.⁶⁸ These newspapers combined their religious message with a political slant on the news of the day. *La Croix du Nord* reflected many of the values of industrialists, while *La Vraie France* reflected legitimist values. The Comité Vrau assured that several of these papers were given out for free in poor neighborhoods and Paul-Féron Vrau created La Presse Régionale, a media trust that centralized much of the work of Catholic newspapers, including their finances and some editorial work, and allowed northern newspapers to share information with Catholic papers in other parts of France.⁶⁹

Le Journal de Roubaix, founded in 1856, and *la Dépêche de Lille* founded in 1882, were both daily conservative, monarchist newspapers.⁷⁰ Another right-wing newspaper available in the three cities, *la Nouvelliste du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais*, was an evening newspaper, founded in 1883 through the fusion of *Mémorial de Lille* and *Propagateur*. Socialist newspapers proliferated as well. The *Réveil du Nord* began publishing in Lille in 1889, as a radical newspaper but became a socialist organ in 1894. It displaced *le Progrès du Nord* as the left-wing radical paper, and combined with its Roubaix-Tourcoing edition, titled *l'Égalité*, sold more than 100,000 issues daily.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Trenard, *Histoire d'une métropole*. 383.

⁶⁹ Bellanger et al., 338.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 378, 403.

⁷¹ Ibid., 403.

L’Echo du Nord was by far the most important and widely read newspaper in the three cities. A republican-leaning newspaper, it could be found on the desks and nightstands of almost every industrialist, who could safely assume the day’s news would be told in a manner that reflected his sensibilities. Workers must have read this newspaper in large numbers as well, for combined with its evening edition, *le Petit Echo du Nord*, it sold more than 180,000 copies daily in 1914.⁷²

Language

Until the end of the Second Empire, most working class people in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing still spoke the local patois rather than a more standardized French. To outsiders, this patois sounded like French spoken very rapidly with a Flemish accent. In some working class neighborhoods before the First World War, this patois was still prevalent.⁷³ The dialect of French spoken in the Département du Nord remained quite distinctive from that found in the capital. Timothy Pooley notes that this parlance resulted from the three-way language contact between Flemish, Picard, and French.⁷⁴ Louis Vermesse published a dictionary of Lille vernacular in 1861, noting that the local language had vitality and a poetic quality to it. The vocabulary of the *patois lillois* remained so unique that Richard Cobb included a glossary of it in his work on occupied France, and Vermesse’s 183-page book enjoyed republishing in 2003.⁷⁵ The Ferry laws

⁷² Ibid., 403.

⁷³ Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 6.

⁷⁴ Tim Pooley, “The Linguistic Assimilation of Flemish Immigrants in Lille (1800-1914),” *Journal of French Language Studies* 16, 2 (2006): 207. Picard is also known as *chtimi* or *rouchi* when spoken in the areas of Nord-Pas-de-Calais area. In her dissertation, Buffton frequently refers to the people of Lille as the “*chtimi*.”

⁷⁵ Richard Cobb, *French and Germans, Germans and French: A Personal Interpretation of France under Two Occupations, 1914-1918 / 1940-1944* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1983), xxv-xxxiv and Louis Vermesse, *Vocabulaire du patois lillois* (Bouchet: La Découverte, 2003), 10.

may have created a population mostly literate in French, but there is little indication they did anything to undermine the unique version of the language spoken in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing.

As Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing evolved into manufacturing hubs, thousands of Belgians flocked to the area looking for work, some commuting daily across the border. But many of these mostly Flemish-speaking workers also ended up living in sordid ghettos in the neighborhoods of Wazemmes, Moulins, Fives, Saint-Sauvier, and Saint-Maurice.⁷⁶ Their presence added a linguistic element to the social inequality created by industrialization. Timothy Pooley notes in his recent study examining the linguistic ramifications of Flemish immigration to northern France that, for such a large group, living in close proximity to their native land, Belgian immigrants became active participants in the economic, cultural, and political life of their new home, often while also remaining a tight-knit community among themselves.⁷⁷

Political Trends

Lille prior to the war was “a place of intellectual ferment.”⁷⁸ Along with Roubaix and Tourcoing, these three industrial cities were ardently socialist on the eve of war, but it was a different form of socialism than that found in the capital. A strong allegiance to both royalism, and later Bonapartism, were the prevalent sentiments through most of the nineteenth century.⁷⁹ The history of republicanism in the tri-city area was brief and

⁷⁶ Marchand, *Histoire de Lille*, 87.

⁷⁷ Pooley, 207.

⁷⁸ “Lille ... un lieu de bouillonnement intellectuel.” Codaccioni, *Histoire d'une métropole*, 387.

⁷⁹ R.D. Anderson, *France 1870-1914: Politics and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 59. For example, in 1914 the city of Roubaix did not contain a single monument to the French Revolution, a rarity in France.

complex. The history of republicanism coincides with the rise of a liberal bourgeoisie, who were the republican leaders prior to the war. Business owners remained loyal to Catholicism despite the laic nature of republicanism, perhaps due to a link between their Catholicism and capitalism, as industrial leaders understood success in business as a sign of divine protection.⁸⁰ However, republican electoral success depended greatly upon working class support.

There was an evolution of working class political consciousness in the Nord. It began with national - Catholic - habits of deference, which initially bound the working class to the radical republicanism of their bourgeois employers. When the Republic offered no tangible amelioration of conditions, workers drifted into socialism, and a few into syndicalism and anarchism. This was possible, as republicanism and radicalism were not deeply entrenched in the Nord. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, the industrial workers of the Nord were uncommitted to any definite philosophy of working-class emancipation.⁸¹ There was a large group of newly industrialized workers that had previously been conservative or apolitical, that during the 1880s were drawn to the type of Marxism preached by Jules Guesde, which mixed reformism and French anti-clericalism with orthodox Marxist economic and social ideals.⁸²

Workers' strikes became quite frequent and intense between 1889 and 1893 and aided the rise of socialist parties. At this time, Nord workers turned more and more to Jules Guesde's Parti Ouvrier Français (POF).⁸³ The textile workers of Lille and Roubaix

⁸⁰ Mayeur and Reberieux, 67-8.

⁸¹ Baker, 359.

⁸² Ibid., 359, 363.

⁸³ Mayeur and Reberieux, 99-100.

were quick to embrace the POF's socialist message of class solidarity.⁸⁴ A nationwide party, the POF garnered its greatest support from the Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing metropolitan triangle. Despite the suffering of workers, however, the party remained passive for quite a while, and Guesdists, including Guesde himself, suffered electoral defeat in the early 1880s at the hands of traditional elites. Nevertheless, the rise of the POF began in the Nord as it won the allegiances of the textile union, whose initial membership was largely unskilled females and Belgian immigrants. However, by the 1890s, when the POF became more concerned with electoral victories than union achievements, it began to concentrate mostly upon male workers' demands.⁸⁵ By the turn of the century, no vestige of women's earlier contributions to the movement remained.⁸⁶

Socialist electoral success began in 1891, when Lille elected the POF co-founder, Paul Lagargue to the Chamber of Deputies as a deputy from Lille. In 1892, Guesdists captured all thirty-six seats on Roubaix's city council, with Henri Carrette, an organizer of a textile workers' union, becoming mayor.⁸⁷ In the legislative elections of 1893, Jules Guesde took industrialist Motte's seat in the Chamber. POF politicians captured the municipal government of Lille in 1895.⁸⁸ Guesde won election to the Chamber of Deputies from a district outside Roubaix in 1893. Motte won that seat back in 1898 and again in 1902, but Guesde regained it in 1906, and then held it until his death in 1922.⁸⁹ Gustave Delory, who began as a newspaper peddler for the socialist *Le Cri du Peuple*,

⁸⁴ Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 6.

⁸⁵ Magraw, 106.

⁸⁶ Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 3.

⁸⁷ David Gordon, "Liberalism and Socialism in the Nord: Eugène Motte and Republican Politics in Roubaix," *French History* 3:3 (1989): 312.

⁸⁸ Hilden, "Class and Gender," 363.

⁸⁹ Hutton, 1:443 and Gordon, 332. Gordon suggests that Motte's success came from a coalition of Catholic and republican moderates with some worker support. Socialist victories in 1906 and 1912 were possible as anticlericalism became an issue, destroying Motte's coalition of supporters.

became a loyal disciple of Jules Guesde. Mayor of Lille from 1896 till 1904, Delory became a national, then international figure for the party, as he became its secretary-general, internationally representing first the POF and thereafter the new, unified socialist party founded in 1905, the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO).⁹⁰ Once Guesdists gained control of municipal governments, they provided social assistance that challenged the traditional church and public system of aid. Dues-paying members had access to food cooperatives, financial assistances through mutual aid societies if injured or fired, maternity benefits, and childcare including free kindergarten.⁹¹ Socialists even established a seaside sanatorium for textile workers' children suffering from tuberculosis.⁹² While socialist parties would remain a defining characteristic of the Nord's major cities, they would not command the unquestioned loyalty of the majority of workers.⁹³

This urban, proletarian disposition toward socialism did not prevent the traditional industrial elite from remaining a force in politics. The socialist movement, however, clearly weakened the position of the traditional elites. Pierre Pouchain writes, "The industrial citadel of Roubaix-Tourcoing was menaced from within."⁹⁴ However, industrial workers showed themselves to be less interested in advancing the POF's socialist vision than in backing whichever politician would provide them with the greatest material benefits.⁹⁵ For example, Eugène Motte in Roubaix and Charles Delesalle in Lille, won their mayoral positions by promising great things. Both then came through on

⁹⁰ Trenard, *Histoire d'une métropole*, 397.

⁹¹ Pierre Pouchain, *Les maîtres du Nord du xix^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Perrin, 1998), 159-60 and Hilden, "Class and Gender," 373.

⁹² Hilden, "Class and Gender," 373.

⁹³ Baker, 377.

⁹⁴ "La citadelle industrielle de Roubaix-Tourcoing était menacée de l'intérieur." Pouchain, 156.

⁹⁵ Gordon, 313.

those promises. In Roubaix, Motte built a beautiful city hall and hospital, and then helped Roubaix successfully host the 1911 international textile exposition. Motte presented himself as a moderate republican and played upon native workers' xenophobia, too, portraying the POF as a "foreign" party that was more concerned with the rights of immigrant Belgian workers than with Frenchmen.⁹⁶ Delesalle was mayor of Lille from 1904 until 1919, and transformed that city into a true regional capital, expanding public electricity, and building beautiful boulevards. He also incorporated some socialist ideas, such as bread banks and funding maternity and newborn assistance, into his works.⁹⁷ Delesalle may have been a conservative, but two out of three of his deputies were from the extreme left.⁹⁸ The POF overcame electoral losses to men like Delesalle and Motte, but at the turn of the century their electoral support leveled off at approximately one third of the total in the Département du Nord.⁹⁹ Guesdists believed that a socialist municipality in Lille foreshadowed a potential national socialist government. However, these dreams were often met with dismay, as Nord workers hedged their bets, often voting for the POF locally but for a "bourgeois" candidate nationally.¹⁰⁰

Tourcoing took a slightly different path to socialism than Lille and Roubaix. While Tourcoing had become more socialist leaning by the start of the twentieth century, it was socialism of a different flavor than Roubaix or Lille. The worker population remained much more ardently Catholic, and, despite their urban environment, retained

⁹⁶ Pouchain, 106. Motte was not a reactionary but a genuine republican, devoted to parliamentary institutions and believing universal suffrage produced the political stability necessary for capitalism to establish general prosperity. Gordon, 314, 317.

⁹⁷ Trenard, *Histoire d'une métropole*, 398.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 401. Delesalle was *conservateur*, a term used starting in the 1880s by those to the right of the republicans to denote that they were either royalist or Bonapartist. Towards the turn of the century, the term liberal was more frequently utilized. Hutton, 1:235.

⁹⁹ Magraw, 106.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Stuart, *Marxism at Work: Ideology, Class and French Socialism during the Third Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 275.

their rural mentality.¹⁰¹ It took longer for textile workers to make the shift from a wider community loyalty to class solidarity. When the shift did occur, it was more gradual than in Lille and Roubaix, where it came intuitively.¹⁰² Hence, as Patricia Hilden describes it, the “socialist conquest of Tourcoing lagged behind.”¹⁰³ It was not until just before the outbreak of war that Tourcoing voters began to elect a number of socialist councilors, and it was only in 1914 that the Guesdist militant, Albert Inghels, became their deputy.¹⁰⁴ Socialism plays an enduring role in the Nord; Lille is still a bastion of the socialist party to this day and gave the Fifth Republic a prime minister, Pierre Mauroy from 1981-1984, under François Mitterrand. Pierre Mauray served as mayor of Lille from 1973-2001.

Religion

Spain governed the Lille triangle until 1667 and that country’s influence created a virulent type of Counter-Reformation Catholicism that endured late into the nineteenth century. Perhaps tied to this, northern France remained Catholic despite the de-Christianization trend some claim spread across most of France.¹⁰⁵ While church attendance decreased in the large industrial cities of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, and the secular socialist worker movement gained influence, the people of these cities celebrated religious holidays in much greater numbers than much of the rest of the country. Weekly church attendance may have waned but in terms of still taking part in

¹⁰¹ Trenard, *Histoire d’une métropole*, 398.

¹⁰² Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 6.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Annette Becker, “D’une guerre à l’autre: mémoire de l’occupation et de la résistance: 1914-1940,” *Revue du Nord* 306 (July-September 1994): 461. It should be noted that the new history orthodoxy states that while Catholicism suffered blows in the early Third Republic, no definitive victories for the forces of secularization occurred, and one should not exaggerate the wane in religiosity in France prior to the First World War. Magraw, 158.

rites of passages, such as marriage and baptism, the working-class remained largely christianized as the war approached. Deborah Buffton suggests that the celebration of religious holidays increased even more once the occupation occurred because they established a sense of continuity and comfort to people feeling helpless and alienated.¹⁰⁶

Different factors ensured Catholicism remained relevant in these cities. One factor was the influx of Flemish-speaking Belgian immigrants who clung to Catholicism as part of their cultural identity.¹⁰⁷ The strength of Catholicism also remained greater in the north than elsewhere because a large majority of the working class had to rely on Catholic charities to supplement their meager wages.¹⁰⁸ A related element was that the industrial elite of the cities remained religious, and frequently imposed their convictions on their dependent workforce.¹⁰⁹ Some members of the bourgeoisie returned to the fold of the Church in response to worker unrest. At least one historian suggested that the northern business elite was actually largely unconcerned with matters of faith, and simply saw religion as a tool to control workers.¹¹⁰ Whether their faith was real or a façade, industrial leaders wanted the church to act as “gendarmes in cassocks,” or to be agents of industrial discipline and social control, a role most Catholic churches were more than willing to play.¹¹¹ Many Nord textile industrialists employed the sisters of Notre Dame de l’Usine confraternity to oversee the installation of religious artifacts and religious practices on factory premises.¹¹² They also regulated sexual segregation in the workplace,

¹⁰⁶ Buffton, 164-5.

¹⁰⁷ Magraw, 183.

¹⁰⁸ Hilden, “Class and Gender,” 371.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Bonnie Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoisies of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 26-7.

¹¹¹ Magraw, 186.

¹¹² Joan L. Coffey, *Léon Harmel: Entrepreneur as Catholic Social Reformer* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 43. The use of confraternities by the upper classes was a long-used stratagem

and monitored the “morality” of employees requesting charitable aid.¹¹³ Indeed, the upper classes felt horrified by the immorality of fraternization between the sexes at work, and frequently asked sisters to watch over workers to ensure no unnecessary interaction took place. They required female workers to attend mass at work and made obligatory confessions within the chapels in the mill.¹¹⁴ It should be noted that the clergy did not act merely as agents of control. At times they attempted to oppose industrial abuse, however most of the time their efforts were futile because of the inability of individual priests and sisters to change the whole industrial system. One exception was Philibert Vrau. A wealthy industrialist and lay Roman Catholic activist, he made it his mission to reinvigorate the religiosity of the citizens of Lille while improving their lives through beneficial societies for workers and demands that workers receive a decent wage. His work was a rare example of religious and socialist aims overlapping. However, the socialists and Vrau differed greatly on the issue of education. His *Comité Vrau* (which he ran with his relative Paul-Féron) paid for 9,045 (out of the city’s school age population of 20,700) Lille children to attend parochial schools, rather than secular public schools by 1883.¹¹⁵ His aim was to counteract what many saw as the positivist side of the lay movement, which opened seventy-five laic schools in the tri-city area. Even at the height of socialist programs providing relief and support to the working class, many still relied

dating back to the Ancien Régime and originally built around guild affiliations. Confraternities aimed to keep the working classes within the Catholic fold and provided constant surveillance of the lower orders, while incorporating them into religious associations under elite control. Andrew E. Barnes, “The Transformation of Penitent Confraternities over the Ancien Régime,” in *Confraternities and Catholic Reform in Italy, France and Spain*, John Patrick Donnelly and Michael W. Maher, eds. (Kirkville, MO: Thomas Jefferson Press, 1999), 133.

¹¹³ Ibid., 186.

¹¹⁴ Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France*, 8.

¹¹⁵ Trenard, *Histoire d’une métropole*, 383.

upon the church for both comfort and charity. This ensured that Catholicism remained relevant in the Nord even when anticlericalism was a politic theme.

Conclusion

While life in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing was difficult for most prior to the war, it did nothing to prepare them for what was to come under occupation. Political battles, waged through the democratic process, did not prepare the citizens of these three cities for the authoritarian rule that would accompany German occupation in October 1914. Problems faced by people before the war were often just exacerbated under occupation. A large portion of the population was already physically weakened preceding an occupation that would send an already high death rate even higher.¹¹⁶ It is interesting to note that a large number of people in these cities truly internalized their religion during occupation rather than simply attending mass to conform to societal demands. Under the *union sacrée*, the church openly supported the war effort and the French government took a hiatus from criticizing the church. This occurred throughout France, and during the war, distinctions between religion and politics blurred. In occupied France the blurring occurred at an even deeper level – that between the daily lives of the people and their religion. All Saints’ Day, the day Catholics remember their dead, became a focus for people in the occupied zone. Living in harsh conditions so close to the battlefield, almost everyone in these major towns had recently lost a loved one, and consequently November 1st had meaning for almost everyone. Buffton illustrates how the Nord in general dealt

¹¹⁶ For the entire population of Lille the death-rate during the years before the war varied between 19 to 21 per 1,000 people. One can assume a disproportionate number of those came from the working class. In 1915 the death-rate increased to 27.73 per 1,000 people and by 1918 it was 41.55 per 1,000 people. Homer Folks, *The Human Costs of the War* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1920), 127.

with the holiday, describing, “Mixtures of pride, sadness, hope, and grief seemed to characterize the accounts of the holiday. Toussaint [All Saints’ Day] was deeply meaningful and its significance had increased because of the conditions of war.”¹¹⁷

People in this area, although not geographically far from Paris and the heart of France, were in some ways culturally different from the rest of the country. Their geographic location shaped by their feelings towards the war. Unlike some of their countrymen, the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing were not jubilant at the thought of war.¹¹⁸ Mayor Delesalle of Lille and other politicians made obvious their pessimistic sentiments about the war once France declared it, but most treated the war as a grim but important duty.¹¹⁹ The pacifist tendencies of this area did not translate into any sentiments of affection toward the Germans once the war began.

¹¹⁷ Buffton, 174.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 33. Buffton further notes that even outside of northern France, not everybody was as elated at the thought of war as many historians argue. Rather, strongly positive reactions to the outbreak of war came from the regions farthest from the probable battlefield, such as Hautes – and Basses-Pyrénées. In other areas, including the capital, the response was mixed.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 34-5.

Chapter Two:

The German Occupation of Northern France

Alan Kramer's *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* describes the German occupied zones during the Great War as vast prisons.¹ While not always utilizing prison imagery, every historian examining occupied France from 1914-1918 provides the same bleak image of inhospitable living conditions in the metropolitan area of France encompassing Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing. These harsh conditions included food shortages, requisitioning, severe and often-time arbitrary German rule, and enemy control over the availability of news, which is the focus of this work. To comprehend how the conurbation of Lille understood the news it received during the war some background information about the German occupation is necessary. This chapter provides a brief overview of the war leading up to the invasion and the capture of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing. It then explores the German administration of the three cities, and the economic exploitation of the area, including requisitions and labor requirements, and the resulting food shortages. Additionally, this chapter examines examples of French resistance to German rule and the German response.

The War Leading to Occupation

Fighting began on the Western Front in August 1914. The German military plan – a slightly modified version of the Schlieffen plan - required Germany to defeat France to the west before engaging Russia to the east. To do so quickly, the Germans planned to

¹ Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 44.

outflank the French fortifications by attacking through Belgium, consequently violating Belgian neutrality.² The Germans placed only light covering forces to the south – where French military leaders assumed the major offensives would take place – and instead placed a heavy concentration of troops further north, made up mainly of their First and Second Armies, with 320,000 men and 260,000 men respectively.³ The right wing of the German attack swept through Belgium and northern France then moved toward Paris, eventually pushing the French army toward Switzerland.⁴ France's General Joseph Joffre expected a German offensive via Belgium. However, he assumed that the British Expeditionary Force could contain what he expected to be a small German force, allowing him to utilize most of his troops in a French offensive beginning in Alsace and heading towards Berlin. What surprised General Joffre was not where Germany chose to attack, but the strength of that attack. He believed Germany lacked the numerical strength its military possessed. Joffre's incorrect assessment grew from his assumption that Germany manned its army like France, that is that it did not include utilizing reserve troops in the frontline. Germany did employ reservists on the frontline, providing it with thousands more troops than Joffre expected. Joffre frantically attempted to reposition French armies while the British landed to make a heroic stand in Mons, Belgium, on August 23, 1914. These miscalculations placed Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing in the

² Michael Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War: A Global History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 11-2.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ Terence Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan: German War Planning 1871-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1. Despite having a small military force of only 117,000 men, Belgium did resist the German invasion and forced the Germans to fight in Belgium much longer than any contemporary military leaders had believed possible. As a result, the Germans dealt harshly with several Belgian cities, including Liège which they destroyed. However, as Isabel Hull notes, German atrocities committed in Belgium had little to do specifically with Belgian behavior; they were part of a more generalized German predilection to destroy opponents. Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 211.

Germans' path. Historians traditionally understood Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing's capture by the Germans and the cities' proximity to the front a result of the failure of the Schlieffen Plan at the Battle of the Marne, during which the Germans failed to capture Paris and were pushed back to a position that led to a war of attrition.⁵

The Capture of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing

The battles of August through October 1914 swirled around Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing; the cities changed hands several times. In an attempt to save the city from the devastation wrought on several Belgian towns, the French military declared Lille an open city on August 1, 1914, much to the surprise of the Military Governor of Lille, General Lebas. Lebas pleaded with the French General Staff not to abandon Lille. However, the French General Staff's strategy called for them to turn their back on the Belgian frontier and face the Rhine. One member of the General Staff, General Michel de Castelnau pointed out that for the Germans to reach Lille they would have to greatly overextend themselves in terms of the number of troops per a meter, stating, "If they [the Germans] come as far as Lille, so much the better for us!"⁶ On August 17, 1914, Lille became part of the military zone and General Albert d'Amade hence took control of the area, on

⁵ Terence Zuber contends that there never was a Schlieffen Plan. Rather, he suggests that Schlieffen intended to fight a defensive war, with the German railway network providing the mobility necessary to defeat each Entente army in succession. The invasion and subsequent occupation of central and northern France was not planned. Instead, the German military commanders wanted to prevent a French escape to Langres by both outflanking the French to the east of Paris and breaking the French center to the southwest of Verdun. German military leaders assumed a number of conventional battles would then ensue, accepting the possibility that either they or the Entente powers would be in control of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing during early battles. Zuber further contends that the German General Staff invented the Schlieffen Plan to explain away their failure to win the 1914 Marne campaign. Zuber, 1-5. Holger Herwig disputes Zuber's claim, noting that as head of the General Staff, Moltke led Germany into war with a modified Schlieffen Plan, that like the original, planned to attack France first, and in doing so violate Belgian neutrality. Holger Herwig, *The Marne, 1914: The Opening of World War I and the Battle that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2009), 42.

⁶ Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Random House, 2004), 34.

August 20 ordering that Lille again prepare to defend itself.⁷ The number of garrison troops stationed at Lille's fortifications increased from 15,000 to 25,000 men on August 21.⁸ Initially German invading troops disregarded Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, as they quickly moved south. On August 23, however, German troops advanced upon the Roubaix-Tourcoing railway station, blowing up the station of Mouscron, but French troops pushed them back and the Germans chose to continue towards Paris.⁹ The next day, August 24, a telegram arrived from France's War Minister, Alexandre Millerand, granting the request of Lille's civilian leaders that the city be declared an open city once again, so as not to expose it to the horrors of siege.¹⁰ General Percin disagreed with this decision but withdrew all troops and military supplies.¹¹ A small German detachment entered Lille on September 2, but disappeared three days later.¹² General d'Amade's troops attempted to fight the larger German contingent heading towards Lille but the French troops had to fall back. The Germans re-occupied the city shortly after on September 6, 1914. After the first enemy airplane appeared and dropped two bombs on the General Post Office in Lille on September 9, French military authorities ordered all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-eight to leave all three cities for Dunkirk immediately.¹³

⁷ Alexandre Percin, *Lille* (Paris: Libraire Bernard Grasset, 1919), 9. General Alexandre Percin was Governor of Lille when the General Staff declared Lille an open city for the second time and it was taken by the Germans. It should be noted that newspapers at the time blamed Percin for giving up Lille easily. This book, which he wrote shortly after the war, was his attempt to bolster his reputation, letting people know that it was War Minister Millerand who ordered Lille to be an open city.

⁸ *Lille Before and During the War*, 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* As part of his declaration of Lille as an open city, the War Minister ordered all troops located between La Bassée and Aire-sur-la-Lys to evacuate the area.

¹¹ Percin, 5.

¹² *Lille Before and During the War*, 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

Meanwhile Paris remained untouched. On September 5, British and French troops launched an attack through a gap that opened between the First and Second German armies, near the Marne River, causing the Germans to retreat. This dashed German hopes of quick victory and led to the “race to the sea.” Outside the tri-city area, both sides attempted to outflank each other as they moved northward and westward from La Bassée towards the northern coast, from October 16 until November 11, 1914.¹⁴ Neither side possessed advantage enough to exploit gaps in both fronts or find the other’s flank. Once the sea was reached, both sides entrenched the fronts, leaving northern, industrial France in the hands of the Germans, isolated from the rest of the country. Over time, this line became defensively more secure with permanent trenches and fortifications, some of which would hold until the very last days of the war.¹⁵ Behind this line, France lost 3,400,000 hectares of land – almost 6 percent of her territory - after the Battle of the Marne. In this area lived 12 percent of the country’s population and was located much of its iron, coal, and steel industry.¹⁶

The advance of German forces toward the Marne left Lille briefly free again. In the “race to the sea,” about 4,000 troops under Colonel Pardieu tried to defend the city against approximately 70,000 German troops from October 10 until October 12. On October 11, bombs struck Lille until seven o’clock in the evening at a rate of forty-three shells per minute.¹⁷ Shells destroyed 1,200 buildings, with some reduced to ruins. Buildings hit included the railroad station, and the Musée de Beaux-Arts, which was hit

¹⁴ William Manchester, “Introduction,” in *Almanac of World War I*, David Burg and Edward Purcell, eds. (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1998), x.

¹⁵ Burg and Purcell, 3.

¹⁶ Pierre Boulin, *L’Organisation du travail dans la region envahie de la France pendant l’occupation* (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1927), xiii.

¹⁷ Buffton, 122.

by seventy-five shells on October 11, 1914.¹⁸ Over half the buildings struck were private homes.¹⁹ In certain cases, such as the rue de Vieux-Marché-aux-Poulets, the bombs destroyed entire streets.²⁰ Such shelling forced Pardieu to surrender Lille on October 13. In Roubaix and Tourcoing, the shells battered some neighborhoods, but these two cities were less harshly shelled prior to the occupation than Lille. Once the occupation began, however, the German forces looted and vandalized the twin cities to the north to the same extent as the regional capital.²¹ The taking of the city killed 200 Lillois civilians.²² The German capture of northern France killed 896 people.²³

The make-up of the cities' populations changed considerably in the weeks leading up to occupation. Richard Cobb notes that most Frenchmen of military age escaped by October 10, which he cites as an indication of confusion on the part of the German high command.²⁴ This skewed the area's demographic make-up, leaving the cities with a disproportionate number of women, children, and older men. Many people with the financial means to leave the area also did so before the invasion. Homer Folks describes the exodus, "[a]s the gray German flood rolled over northern France, a million people fled before it as before a tidal wave."²⁵ The citizens of these towns partially knew what to expect, as the Belgian population of these cities already had exploded in late August 1914, as refugees from the German invasion fled south. The Belgians brought with them tales of German horrors that foreshadowed the tri-city area's destiny. Prefect Félix Trépont of the Département du Nord asked all town mayors to provide financial

¹⁸ Marchand, *Histoire de Lille*, 99 and *Lille Before and During the War*, 38.

¹⁹ Buffton, 122.

²⁰ *Lille Before and During the War*, 7.

²¹ Pouchain, 197.

²² Marchand, *Histoire de Lille*, 99.

²³ Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 49.

²⁴ Cobb, *French and Germans*, 12.

²⁵ Folks, 121.

assistance to these refugees, noting that the large number of Belgian workers already contributed to the area's prosperity through their hard work, and Belgians should be given the same assistance as Frenchmen.²⁶

The British soon launched two attacks attempting to retake Lille, resulting in battles around La Bassée and Armentières.²⁷ The British held no advantage, and the Germans successfully resisted their attack. As the tri-city area began its long sentence under occupation, a war of attrition – one that would be won by whoever held out the longest – solidified along the trenches. A 450-mile long front from Nieuwport to the Swiss frontier separated Lille from Armentières by early 1915, two cities that were only about ten miles away from each other but on opposite sides of the trenches, and hence worlds apart for the next four years.²⁸

German Administration of the Occupied Zones

The German military during the First World War gravitated towards extremism. In terms of occupation, extremism meant the desire to establish perfect order and complete obedience in the enemy population.²⁹ Utilizing the existing municipal government system, it was possible to impose a much greater degree of control over people in the cities of northern France as compared to occupied zones on the Eastern Front.³⁰ The Germans removed French government officials from power in positions higher than that of the mayor. The Germans required mayors to remain in office to act as

²⁶ Buffton, 28-9.

²⁷ H.P. Willmott, *World War I* (London: DK, 2003), 61.

²⁸ Kramer, 36.

²⁹ Hull, 1.

³⁰ Hull, 249.

conduits to pass information to the citizenry.³¹ This policy decapitated the French departmental hierarchy, with the removal of prefects and subprefects. Mayors (or other civil servants if the mayor had mobilized) along with a municipal commission oversaw the execution of orders to civilians, the organization of finances, and the payment of indemnities.³²

The civilians of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing suffered through an occupation, during which German military and administrative authorities alternated in maintaining their subjection. The German authorities first divided occupied France into staging areas, or “*zones d'étapes*,” under military administration. A governor was at the head of each major regional division and a commandant at each local headquarters.³³ General von Heinrich commanded in Lille, Commandant Hofmann was responsible for Roubaix, and Commandant von Tessin was in charge of Tourcoing. Officially a civilian inspectorship, an *Inspection des étapes des affaires économiques*, was supposed to oversee economic affairs, but the need to use military force to carry out requisitions and forced labor confused the distinction between German civilian and military personnel.³⁴ Military police were responsible for discipline and public order, and field police were responsible for gathering military information and conducting censuses. Both were present in all three cities.³⁵ Despite the tight control of people’s movements, the Germans clearly had not developed an overall plan for administrating the cities. Rather, their administrative

³¹ McPhail, 39.

³² Cobb, *French and Germans*, 27, and Laska, 111.

³³ Cobb, *French and Germans*, 31.

³⁴ Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau, and Becker, 47.

³⁵ Laska, 111 and Georges Gromaire, *L'occupation allemande en France (1914-1918)* (Paris: Payot, 1925), 51.

policies developed slowly, through trial and error, and did not show any consistency until two years into the occupation.³⁶

German occupation did have one overarching theme: isolation. The French civilians were not only isolated from the rest of France, but from other areas of the occupied zone. The Germans treated each municipality individually, making every town an independent commune with little interaction with neighboring areas. This municipalization of civilian life and authority – each town’s mayor reported directly to the German authorities – meant that as the occupation dragged on there was less and less contact between Lille and Roubaix and Tourcoing. Starting in January 1915, French civilians needed German regulated passes, attainable only for heavy fees, to travel outside one’s immediate vicinity.³⁷ Obtaining the necessary passes to travel from Lille to the other two cities was both difficult and expensive. While travelers also needed passes to move between Roubaix and Tourcoing, the French could more easily attain these passes. A certain irony existed as the trams continued to run and go everywhere they did before the war, including the Belgian frontier, but the Germans forbade the French from riding the trams without a pass.³⁸ This system also aimed to avoid the occupied area acquiring a regional identity.³⁹ Each city became its own despotically ruled state. Richard Cobb asserts that such municipalism was firmly rooted in the area’s history, and at the best of times Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing rarely cooperated with each other.⁴⁰ But such enforced municipal autonomy reversed the work of building a centralized French state

³⁶ Hans W. Gatzke, *Germany’s Drive to the West: A Study of Germany’s Western War Aim During the First World War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1967), 84.

³⁷ *Lille Before and During the War*, 12-3.

³⁸ *Le Journal des réfugiés du Nord*, February 26, 1916.

³⁹ Cobb, *French and Germans*, 27.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

and epitomized the efforts of German authorities to divide and control French citizens in the occupied zone.

In addition to the passes necessary for most travel that we have noted, the German authorities used their power to control every aspect of life. They took a fastidious census of the population early during the occupation and repeatedly updated it. German regulations demanded each house post on the front door a list of occupants, including their ages, genders, and occupations. Identity cards with photographs were mandatory. The German authorities frequently issued new rules, made available to the urban populations through notices posted through the city and in local newspapers. Many of these rules were vague in nature (for example, telling people they must shovel their walkways in a *timely manner*, without clarifying what constituted a timely manner), adding to the stress of occupied life.⁴¹ At times, it was the more minor rules that truly insulted the French people. For example, the Germans imposed Berlin time, one-hour in advance of Parisian time, in the occupied zone, a change meant to show complete German control of civilian life, rather than to allow for more hours of light to work. The German occupiers also placed strict curfews upon the French public, which varied over the course of occupation. *Grusserlass*, the requirement that Frenchmen had to step off the sidewalk and tip their hats in deference to German officers, was another much despised rule.

The taking of hostages was a technique of control the German occupiers employed freely. While in a sense every Frenchmen in the occupied zone was a hostage, the Germans took literal hostages as well. On the first day of occupation, the Germans seized approximately sixty hostages in Lille, chosen from among the city's leaders. Those

⁴¹ Buffton, 132.

taken included Bishop Charot, the Prefect Félix Trépoint, Mayor Charles Delesalle, deputy mayors, and a couple members of the Chamber of Deputies.⁴² Ten men at a time spent the night at the Citadel under German supervision. Starting in 1915 the Germans relaxed the rules, only requiring hostages to sign a presence-sheet, but later that year they again forced hostages to spend the time in the Citadel. Then the rules switched to all the men signing in both morning and evening, until the Germans dispensed with hostage taking in October 1915.⁴³ The Germans took hostages to be able to hold them accountable for civilian actions; this was supposed to deter major acts of resistance with the threat that the authorities could deport hostages to Germany or even execute them. Later in the war mass arrests, imprisonments, and deportations were the deterrents. Such issues added to the psychological trauma of occupation.⁴⁴

An exception to the Germans' all-encompassing control was schooling. The German overseers showed little interest in regulating education in the occupied zone. Perhaps this was because in occupying northern France, Germany only aimed to contribute to the success of their fighting troops: “[n]o grander goal (of annexation, or demonstration of organizational superiority) clouded their practical aim.”⁴⁵ To the extent feasible, the pre-occupation education personnel remained in place.⁴⁶ Furthermore, schools utilized the same pre-war history textbooks, which uniformly carried an extreme anti-German bias. The Germans ordered revisions, but with paper and ink shortages, they did not pursue the matter.⁴⁷ The Germans spent most of their energy exploiting the area

⁴² *Lille Before and During the War*, 12.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Hull, 249.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Cobb, *French and Germans*, 26.

⁴⁷ Buffton, 251.

for short-term benefit, rather than preparing it for long-term administration.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, in such an environment, the schooling of children took on a secondary importance to simple survival, but it did not disappear completely. By November 1914, a third of Lille's schools had reopened.⁴⁹ The original bombardment destroyed five schools in Lille, while the Germans converted two other schools into hospitals and ten more into troop barracks.⁵⁰ Schools of higher education, including the Lycée, the École Industrielle, and Conservatoire resumed in 1915. While there was no permission for baccalaureate candidates to travel to Lille to take the required exams, the German authorities compromised by allowing those candidates to go to Saint-Quentin in 1915. Nevertheless, difficulties stemming from occupation interrupted all levels of schooling at times. During the winter, schools often closed for a lack of heating fuel.⁵¹ The absence of a great number of younger teachers mobilized in advance of the occupation left as teachers older men whose health began to fail. Furthermore, fewer students were able to attend school, either due to their need to scrounge for extra money to support their families, the undernourishment which sapped their health, or their conscription by German occupiers into labor gangs.

⁴⁸ There is debate as to whether the Germans believed occupied France would become a satellite state of Germany. Defining war aims was a risky endeavor for Germany, which claimed to be engaged in a war of defense. Nevertheless, Germany clearly set out what it hoped to gain in Bethmann Hollweg's September Program. It was a secret document, but during the war the contents continued to filter into the public domain. The plan stated France would lose Belfort, the western Vosges, the region of Briey-Longwy, and the coastline from Dunkirk to Boulogne. Belgium would lose Liège, Verviers, and Anthery, while the rest of Belgium would become a rump vassal state. Jean-Jacques Becker, "War Aims and Neutrality," in *A Companion to World War I*, John Horned, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 203.

⁴⁹ Cobb, *French and Germans*, 25.

⁵⁰ *Lille Before and During the War*, 13

⁵¹ Anette Becker, "Life in an Occupied Zone," 633.

Economic Exploitation

Germany prepared for war with a newly updated field manual for rear areas, the *Kriegs-Ettappen-Ordnung*, or KEO.⁵² While it offered little guidance for a long occupation, it did make clear that rear zones, especially if they were enemy territory, had to furnish all categories of provisions to the German military.⁵³ The occupation of northern France was total as the Germans brought every aspect of French civilian life under their control and expropriated the region's wealth and destroyed its infrastructure.⁵⁴ Thus, German official policy fostered a situation of conflict, in which the German occupiers sought to extract the most out of their economically rich new territory, while the French living in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing did the best to counter their efforts.⁵⁵ At the same time, the KEO set the stage for individual acts of economic terror by German enlisted personnel. Omitting any discussion of international law, while at the same time encouraging subordinates to behave independently in rear areas, the KEO helped create a German attitude that would economically destroy the tri-city area. As Eugène Martin-Mamy bitterly recalled in his memoir about requisitioning during the occupation, the Germans "were men who steal to live, and live to steal."⁵⁶

The plundering began with exorbitant war contributions. From Lille alone (the Germans charged each city separately), German authorities demanded a million francs by November 10, 1914, two million more by November 17, and three million more by

⁵² Hull, 226.

⁵³ Ibid., 226-7.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 248.

⁵⁵ McPhail, 6.

⁵⁶ "Il y a des gens qui volent pour vivre, eux vivaient pour voler." Eugène Martin-Mamy, *Quatre ans avec les barbares: Lille pendant l'occupation allemande* (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1919), 26.

November 24.⁵⁷ The Germans expected that each city pay to feed the troops billeted within its limits, which for Lille amounted to 10,000 francs daily at the start of the war. While German authorities did permit some deadline extensions when cities could not obtain the funds, they never reduced the amounts demanded. By the end of the war, Lille had paid over 184,000,000 francs to the Germans.⁵⁸ These demands quickly depleted the cities of enough French currency for circulation in a normal fashion. Thus, the Germans developed vouchers to act as paper money in each city, and this system of local paper currency operated for the rest of the war. It provided the Germans with an additional implement of control, as this currency was not routinely accepted outside the occupied territory, although vouchers from one occupied city would be accepted in other occupied towns.⁵⁹

Requisitions of material items quickly degenerated into expropriation, as the Germans confiscated industrial and personal goods for not only immediate military use, but also exported items back to Germany as booty.⁶⁰ Requisitioning depleted homes not just of silver, wine, and other valuable items, but furniture, linens, and other necessities needed for basic comfort. The machinery and raw materials of several large factories simply vanished on trains headed to Berlin. The Germans ordered owners of businesses, such as some shops and secondary industries, which employed older men and women, but that were of no use to the Germans, to close down and lay off their workers, adding to

⁵⁷ *Lille Before and During the War*, 12.

⁵⁸ Buffton, 14.

⁵⁹ McPhail, 42-4. As warnings in the *Bulletin de Lille* and *Bulletin de Roubaix* reveal, this system was extremely susceptible to forgeries, since people in one town would be unfamiliar with how vouchers from other cities should look. In one case, vouchers started circulating in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing from a small village in the occupied zone that never printed vouchers.

⁶⁰ Hull, 251 and Boulin, 11.

the already considerable unemployment problem.⁶¹ While shutting down these businesses worsened the economy of the cities, and meant more people needed official aid to obtain food, the German occupiers, still thinking in the short term, requisitioned all materials of value from closed businesses. The disappearance of industrial equipment was not the only obstacle to continued production in the occupied zone. Most able-bodied men left Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing preceding German entry, leaving industrial towns without young male workers. The initial bombardment of Lille destroyed some of the city's largest factories, including the Wallaert and Le Blan cloth manufacturing plants and the Albert Dujardin steam machine workshop.⁶² The British blockade meant no new supplies of cotton, a key raw material for this manufacturing center, could enter the occupied area.⁶³ Whatever production did continue needed the German authorities' permission, and was to be for German use. Several industrial leaders bravely refused to produce for the Germans, sometimes leading to the confiscation of their entire businesses. Eugène Motte, Roubaix's leading industrialist and former mayor, demonstrated great reluctance to cooperate with the Germans, despite the large sums of money offered to him. Roubaix's mayor at the time of occupation, Jean-Baptiste Lebas, spent a large portion of the war as a German prisoner because of his refusal to work with the Germans.⁶⁴

Some stores, restaurants, banks, and other basic services in the cities did reopen in modest form shortly after the occupation. With limited supplies and funds – German requisitions and indemnities quickly stripped the cities of most of their consumer goods and hard currency – economic life hardly returned to normal. Life was more difficult in

⁶¹ McPhail, 34.

⁶² Pouchain, 193.

⁶³ Ibid., 194.

⁶⁴ Annette Becker, "Life in an Occupied Zone: Lille, Roubaix, Tourcoing," in *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced*, Hugh Cecil and Peter H. Liddle, ed. (London: Leo Copper, 1996), 634.

Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing than in the countryside, since it was extremely difficult to find work (for those unwilling to work for the Germans) in the cities and food was scarce. Germany published reports in 1915 stating that commercial life in Lille was once again thriving a mere fifteen weeks after those fateful days in October 1914.⁶⁵ This was far from the truth. German economic exploitation ravaged the region's industry and economy.

Labor Requirements

The German occupiers viewed the civilian population as another commodity for their exploitation. At some point during the occupation, the Germans subjected almost every person (other than very small children) in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing to forced labor. At first, the Germans attempted to recruit unemployed volunteers to dig trenches and work various construction jobs, but it quickly became apparent that volunteers would not meet the workload the German occupiers required. Thus, the Germans forced a large number of people to work for them locally, in the construction jobs as well as in seized factories or in providing sanitation services. An important element of forced labor, however, was also deportation. One of the harshest elements of life in occupied France was the constant fear of deportation. It was common practice to deport people from the city to work in agricultural settings in other parts of occupied France or within Germany. During the invasion of 1914, the Germans deported approximately 10,000 French civilians to Germany, where they endured harsh conditions.⁶⁶ The Germans' motivation for such early examples of deportations remains unclear, but deterring resistance by

⁶⁵ Buffton, 141.

⁶⁶ Kramer, 44.

removing community leaders and collective punishment may have been two possible aims.⁶⁷ Whatever other reasons the Germans had for deporting French civilians from the occupied zone, economic exploitation became the key motivator. Most shocking for the three cities' urban population, Germans shortly extended such labor service to women as well as men, and soon they too lived in fear of general mobilization. Frequently civilians had thirty minutes notice before the Germans herded them to unknown locales. Some young girls were "dragged from their parents at bayonet-point, screaming and terrified..."⁶⁸ The most infamous of these deportations occurred on Easter 1916, when the Germans deported twenty thousand people from Lille, a large portion of whom were women and young girls. The Germans sent many of these women to the countryside of the Ardennes and the Aisne to do heavy fieldwork. Local villagers treated the women harshly; the Germans told locals that the women were "*femmes à boche*," or prostitutes cozy with German soldiers.⁶⁹ The occupiers sent some to Germany. The outcry was even greater against these deportations, because of the large number of people taken, and the relative youth of many of the women; some were as young as sixteen years old. Other aspects of the deportation incensed the Lillois, too. The Germans rounded up women on Good Friday, and subjected even the youngest girls to forced gynecological exams.⁷⁰ While the French government's white book portrayed the Easter deportation as cruel and heartless, it certainly served real German needs.⁷¹ It alleviated a real and growing labor shortage in Germany while at the same time helping empty major French cities filled with

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ McPhail, 168.

⁶⁹ James F. McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot: The Place of Women in French society 1870-1940* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1981), 101.

⁷⁰ Buffton, 103-4 and Kramer, 222.

⁷¹ *The New York Times Current History, The European War, Vol. IX, October-December, 1916* (New York: The New York Times Company, 1917), 126.

unemployed, hungry populations. Presumably, too, such tactics served to keep occupied populations pacified by demonstrating German mastership.

While this treatment of women outraged much of the world, less noticed was the deportation of men to work camps in Germany. While deportations occurred prior to 1916, German labor policy for the occupied territories moved from a focus upon recruiting volunteers from the occupied zones to one of forced labor in late August 1916 when German Field Marshal and Chief of Staff Paul von Hindenburg and his quartermaster general Erich Ludendorff took over the Third Army Supreme Command.⁷² In 1916, the Germans formed the ZAB (*Zivil Arbeiter Bataillonnen*) or forced civilian labor battalions. Known among the French as the *brassards rouges* for the red armbands workers had to wear, this “uniform” demonstrated that they were a conscripted army of civilian workers.⁷³ Many of the people doing this hard labor were young men not of age to mobilize in 1914.⁷⁴ The German occupiers deported men forced into the ZAB to labor camps in the occupied territory. The Germans chose the men from lists of unemployed that the mayor provided, often under duress. When this did not provide enough workers, the Germans simply rounded men up in the street. These workers endured extremely harsh living and working conditions even by the standards of occupied France; they were often near the frontline and always without adequate shelter or food. Those unlucky enough to be deported to Germany faced a day and a half journey made in overcrowded cattle-cars without access to food or washrooms. Once at the camps, life was harsh.

Helen McPhail does not overstate the situation when she notes, “...these conditions were

⁷² Mark Spoerer, “The Mortality of Allied Prisoners of War and Belgian Civilian Deportees in German Custody during the First World War: A Reappraisal of the Effects of Forced Labour,” *Population Studies* 60 (July 2006): 123.

⁷³ Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau, and Becker, 47.

⁷⁴ Laska, 112.

a dreadful forerunner of later decades in other countries' gulags and concentration camps."⁷⁵ While estimates exist for how many men Germans kept at different camps at different times, the constant rotation of men between camps (to avoid any bonding with the local people and because their bodies simply wore out) makes it difficult to estimate how many men served in labor gangs both in Germany and occupied France along the frontline. Estimates of around 100,000 seem plausible.⁷⁶ A large number of French people from the occupied zone worked as forced labor in Germany and France until the summer of 1917. From this point until the end of the war, forced labor and deportation still occurred in the occupied areas on a smaller scale, with the Germans reverting to a policy of recruiting volunteers.⁷⁷ While French civilians in the occupied zone lived in constant fear of deportation, it is worthwhile to note that despite the severe hardship caused by deportations, they were not an expression of a grand ideological scheme to empty northern France of its native people.⁷⁸

Much of the work demanded by the Germans was contrary to the Hague Convention that stipulated no civilian is supposed to be forced to work in the war effort against his or her own country. Violating international law seemed to concern the German high command little, as on the subject General Ludendorff stated, "all social misgivings or reservations deriving from international law must be ignored."⁷⁹ While one could argue almost all work fell into this category, whether it was harvesting food for German soldiers, weaving cloth at a German-seized factory that would end up either as uniforms or sandbags, or working in German-seized mines bringing up coal for the

⁷⁵ McPhail, 175.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 177.

⁷⁷ Spoerer, 123.

⁷⁸ Hull, 257.

⁷⁹ Kramer, 44.

enemy, some work was blatantly in violation of the Convention. French civilians repaired railway lines and fortifications and made barbed wire entanglements and mantraps.⁸⁰ The knowledge that they were helping the enemy plagued many people in occupied France. One person wrote, “We are forced to construct trenches to kill our fathers, our bothers, our cousins.”⁸¹ It is not surprising that such radicalized exploitation fuelled great hatred amongst the occupied French population for the Germans. Intertwined with the misery caused by forced labor was the constant hunger most French civilians experienced under occupation.

Food Shortages

Northern France was a highly industrialized and densely populated area cut off from both export markets and imported raw materials. Simply feeding the population became extremely difficult in this situation. Technically, the local commandants’ duties included feeding the poor and reacting promptly to civilian complaints.⁸² Instead, the occupiers seized over 80 percent of the 1914 harvest to feed German troops stationed in France and civilians back in Germany, ensuring there was not enough food even for those French people who could afford to pay.⁸³ Within the German leadership, feelings on this topic varied only slightly. The Prussian finance minister commented in September 1914 that “it’s better that the Belgians starve than that we do.”⁸⁴ Bethmann’s counter position that “Germany had naturally assumed the duty of satisfying the most pressing needs of

⁸⁰ McPhail, 160. For a detailed overview of the mineral, food, metal, and cloth industries during the occupation see Boulin, 17-88.

⁸¹ Kramer, 45.

⁸² Hull, 227.

⁸³ McPhail, 33.

⁸⁴ Hull, 86. His feelings on northern France were identical, or even less caring.

the population ... as far as this can be reconciled with our own needs” was hardly a strong defense for making sure people in occupied Belgium and France were well fed.⁸⁵

As prices soared with depleted supplies in occupied France, cost became a form of rationing, leaving only a limited portion of the population able to purchase needed food. By 1915, the German authorities in each city established rations for the French population – 150 grams of rye and 250 grams of potatoes per day, and 150 grams of meat per week.⁸⁶ These rations dropped throughout the war.⁸⁷ The caloric intake of the average city dweller was much below that required for a healthy existence. By October 1917, the average Lillois survived on a diet of 1400 calories, 800 less than the minimum daily requirement for an adult; caloric intake was perhaps slightly higher in Roubaix and Tourcoing.⁸⁸ Eugène Martin-Mamy noted that by the winter of 1917 people showed signs of a lack of food, the streets filled with yellow faces, hollow and sickly from nutritional deprivation.⁸⁹

Doctor Albert Calmette, a physician and director of the Pasteur Institute of Lille, remained in Lille during the occupation, and was a leading source on the healthfulness of occupied France.⁹⁰ He notes, “...Food rations distributed to the population were much below the normal needs of young people. Bread was scarce and of bad quality. There was little rice, beans, or corn, and very small amounts of sugar, lard, and canned meat.

⁸⁵ Hull, 228.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁸⁷ Buffton, 68.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Martin-Mamy, 160.

⁹⁰ Dr. Calmette was so outraged at how the Germans conducted themselves during the occupation that shortly after the war he addressed a complaint to the Académie de Médecine, in his name and the name of virtually all the scientific workers who lived through the occupation. It stated that they would not collaborate in any German publication or take part in any scientific meeting or conference attended by any German workers who had not first expressed a public declaration of their disapproval of the antisocial acts of their government during the war. Albert Calmette, “The Germans and Scientific Workers of Lille,” *The British Medical Journal* 3025 (December 21, 1918): 693.

For more than a year before the end of the war, there were no potatoes and no fresh meats. Butter and eggs were to be had only by the very rich.”⁹¹ The consequences of this food shortage were obvious: Doctor Calmette believed the most serious effect was to arrest the growth of the juvenile population. Fourteen-year old children looked to be ten years old, and the majority of eighteen-year old girls were only as developed as average thirteen-year olds during normal times.⁹² Due in part to a lack of food, disease ravaged the cities. Dysentery, scurvy, tuberculosis and other diseases related directly to a lack of food were common in all three cities. A typhoid fever outbreak overtook Lille in December 1915, but German authorities, through tight control of travel and sanitation measures, kept it from spreading to Roubaix and Tourcoing. The people of the cities lived in a weakened state. As Helen McPhail writes, “[T]he need for food brought degradation to everyone, no matter what their peace-time status...”⁹³

The Germans allowed outside agencies to help counteract the negative effects of their aggressive exploitation of the area’s food supply. The efforts of the Commission for Relief in Belgium (C.R.B.) kept many people from succumbing to malnutrition and disease. Officially founded on October 22, 1914, Herbert Hoover’s relief organization started by aiding occupied Belgium and extended assistance to occupied France in March 1915.⁹⁴ All foodstuffs supplied by the C.R.B. were meant for the civilian population, unlike food produced in the environs of the cities, to which the Germans claimed first right. The Commission for Relief in Belgium was an amazing organization that acted

⁹¹ Folks, 127.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ McPhail, 44.

⁹⁴ Chapter 4 of Eugene Lyons, *Herbert Hoover: A Biography* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1964), 84-97, provides a concise overview of the complex administration necessary to supply northern France and Belgium and the political considerations that often came close to derailing the service.

more like an independent state than anything else; to secure and transport food to the needy in the occupied zone, the C.R.B. not only raised and spent vast amounts of money, it created its own shipping and distribution network to reach the occupied zones.⁹⁵ The C.R.B. raised funds, bought, shipped, and imported the food, and a local body, the Comité d'Alimentation du Nord de la France (C.A.N.F.) oversaw local distribution. Local C.A.N.F. boards set daily rations, and households could purchase goods once a week at a fixed price. They also provided free ration cards to those without means to pay. When supplies failed to meet basic needs, it was the local boards' responsibility to see that hospitals, children, and charities received priority for scant resources.

Despite its remarkable efforts, the C.R.B. was unable to provide a constant supply of all foods. The items available varied considerably over time and location.⁹⁶ Frequently citizens of the three cities lacked necessities. For example in Lille during January 1916 potatoes, butter, eggs, and milk were all unavailable, vegetables were extremely scarce, and there were insufficient quantities of bread.⁹⁷ Part of the problem was simply attaining and shipping supplies to the occupied zones. Sadly, another problem was that many of the Comité d'Alimentation du Nord de la France's local boards proved to be corrupt, keeping supplies for themselves and friends or selling them to black market brokers. When this occurred local staff turned people away from C.R.B. stores despite valid ration cards and money, simply telling them supplies were exhausted.⁹⁸ Despite these problems, the C.R.B. provided food that kept the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing from dying

⁹⁵ McPhail, 62-3.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 71.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁹⁸ Maxence van der Meersch, born in Roubaix in 1907, painfully captured the suffering caused by a lack of food that was frequently exacerbated by local-level corruption throughout his novel, *Invasion*, based on his knowledge of local conditions during the war. Maxence van der Meersch, *Invasion*, trans. Gerard Hopkins, (New York: The Viking Press, 1937).

of starvation in large numbers. A *New York Times* article from spring 1917 quotes an escaped Englishman from Roubaix, who reported that the city exhausted its food supply and was almost wholly dependent on the Commission. “Without it, all the people would have starved.”⁹⁹

Resistance and Repression of Resistance

How did people respond to the pitilessness of occupation, what Andreas Laska terms, “hard and pure Germanification?”¹⁰⁰ Open rebellion against German forces in the cities was rare. Perhaps widespread agitation did not occur because practically everyone in the Nord concentrated his or her efforts on obtaining food. Most people were also fearful of German reprisal for any acts of disobedience, which was certain to be swift and harsh. As Isabel Hull discusses in *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*, the Imperial German military repeatedly resorted to tremendous violence and destruction in excess of Germany’s own security requirements and even contrary to military effectiveness.¹⁰¹

Some people defied the Germans by doing as little for them as possible without facing arrest. Forced labor frequently met with resistance – people refusing to comply. The Germans always responded to such resistance with fines, imprisonment, and deportation, followed by even severer conditions and harder work. People did not work against their own country willingly. Disturbances broke out in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing over the issue of sewing sandbags to protect German trenches. The German authorities quickly squashed such resistance, with taking more hostages and more

⁹⁹ *The New York Times*, March 28, 1917.

¹⁰⁰ Laska, 113: “germanisation pur et dure.”

¹⁰¹ Hull, 1.

extreme forced labor practices.¹⁰² A brave few partook in even great resistance in the form of covert activity that undermined the German authorities.

Resistance sometimes took the form of hiding allied soldiers and helping them out of the occupied zone or sending messages to British and French armies by releasing carrier pigeons, making signals, ringing bells, or using radio transmitters.¹⁰³ All these activities carried the risk of the death penalty. A number of British and French soldiers found themselves stranded behind the German lines once the war of movement ceased and would be the subject of heroic local repatriation efforts by French and Belgian citizens, such as Edith Cavell. General von Heinrich, the German governor of Lille, made it clear that those who protected and hid soldiers after December 4, 1914 faced the death penalty.

History remembers the most famous resisters as the Jacquet Committee, named after Eugène Jacquet. Several men and a few women worked together to form a regular escape network to aid soldiers trapped in the occupied zone. They provided food, money, shelter, and forged passes for men whom they hid from the German occupiers until they could sneak them across the Belgian border. Once in Belgium, escaping soldiers still had a harrowing journey ahead of them, which often involved showing German sentries forged identity cards, sneaking past other sentries at night, and crawling under wire fences.¹⁰⁴ After successfully aiding dozens of military age men, the Germans arrested the group and placed them on trial. The Germans knew a covert group was aiding people's

¹⁰² Anette Becker, "Life in an Occupied Zone," 634.

¹⁰³ McPhail, 126.

¹⁰⁴ Harry Beaumont wrote of his experience escaping from Belgium, demonstrating all the difficulties and dangers in making it across to the Dutch frontier. He notes that he was the eighty-third person Edith Cavell aided, but only the thirteenth to actually make it out of German occupied territory. Harry Beaumont, "Trapped in Belgium," in Hugh Durnford, ed. *Tunnelling to Freedom and other Escape Narratives from World War I* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2004), 24-42.

escape and in July 1916, the military closed off Lille for a detailed search and German military police arrested approximately 200 people.¹⁰⁵ The four leaders of the group, Eugène Jacquet, Ernest Deconinck, Georges Maertens, and Sylvère Verhulst, faced insurmountable evidence, including the diary of an escaped British pilot named Robert Mapplebeck, who taunted the Lille Governor Heinrich with flyovers and dropping notes to him. Despite Jacquet's claim that he worked alone, all four received death sentences and died by firing squad. As we shall see later in the chapter exploring the clandestine press, other brave French civilians resisted the German mandate against disseminating any information not pre-approved by occupation authorities.

Another national war hero, Louise de Bettignies, began her career as a secret agent by volunteering with the Red Cross, carrying letters from her hometown of Lille to unoccupied France.¹⁰⁶ The British Intelligence Service, impressed with success, created for her the false name of Alice Dubois and she, along with a Roubaix woman named Leonie Vanhoutte – alias Charlotte – began collecting information for them in February 1915.¹⁰⁷ The two women, utilizing Bettignies's church connections, created the "Alice network" of two hundred agents and gathered information important to the war effort, including items on the locations of artillery batteries, munitions depots, and troop concentration, and then secretly crossed the Dutch border to deliver the intelligence.¹⁰⁸ In October 1915, the Germans captured both women, who bravely refused to provide the Germans with information, protecting their agents from arrest. In prison Bettignies

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 120.

¹⁰⁶ Margaret H. Darrow, *French woman and the First World War: War Stories of the Home Front* (New York: Berg, 2000), 281.

¹⁰⁷ Tammy M. Proctor, *Female Intelligence: Women and Espionage in the First World War* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 117.

¹⁰⁸ Darrow, 281.

continued to resist, as she refused to do any work that would have aided the German war effort, an act which earned her solitary confinement, where privations and poor medical care led to her death in September 1918.¹⁰⁹ After the war, the people of Lille worked to secure her place in history, which included a monument in honor in Lille. In 1924, Antoine Redier published the well-known text *La guerre des femmes: Histoire de Louise de Bettignies et ses compagnes*, which detailed the activities of the Alice network.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

No history of northern France's occupation would be complete without mentioning the January 1916 explosion of the Lille ammunition storehouse in the city ramparts. The blast wounded or killed many people, both German and French, and it rendered a large area uninhabitable. Both the Germans and French suffered and the cause of the explosion was never conclusively discovered. Briefly the tragedy brought both sides together; both sides marched in the funeral procession for the dead together and they grieved together. However, the Germans assumed espionage and blamed the French. The Germans seized glass supplies to replace windows for the occupying forces from people who were left with extremely inadequate shelter during the harshest winter months. Perhaps this event captures the essence of the German occupation of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing: everybody suffered, but the French always suffered more.

The war's total physical damage to the occupied territories was overwhelming. During the course of the war, military action destroyed or damaged 360,000 buildings in

¹⁰⁹ Darrow, 282.

¹¹⁰ Antoine Redier, *La guerre des femmes: Histoire de Louise de Bettignies et ses compagnes* (Paris: Editions de la Vraie France, 1924).

the Département de Nord.¹¹¹ As the Germans retreated from Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing in October 1918, the German high command ordered their troops to destroy everything in the area, leaving behind only a wasteland for the enemy to take back. As Alan Kramer notes, these actions, that included stripping museums of their artifacts, could by not by any stretch of the imagination be justified as a military necessity; it was simply pillage and destruction without purpose.¹¹² Liberated Lille's population was 110,000, only half of its prewar 220,000.¹¹³ Not surprisingly, most occupied populations interpreted their lives as living on the front, where they were doing daily battle with the enemy, even though their relationship with the enemy varied slightly.¹¹⁴ Despite the fact that the Germans committed most of the extreme violence in the early months of occupation and in the last years of the war the two sides tentatively moved closer to each other and formed some personal relationships, the resentment and fear always remained, as every urban dweller had to face hunger, potential imprisonment, deportation, and forced labor.

The siege that the occupation represented to the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing began October 1914 and lasted until October 1918. For almost 1500 days, the German military and civilian authorities persecuted civilians, seeing them both as “human requisitions” that could be used to strengthen the German position, and opponents to be treated much like enemy soldiers. Surviving in such a situation was extremely difficult – towards the end of the war approximately 80 percent of the urban population relied upon charities to survive. Helen McPhail summarized the situation by

¹¹¹ Buffton, 15.

¹¹² Kramer, 50

¹¹³ Folks, 126.

¹¹⁴ Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau, and Becker, 43.

stating, “Most people survived on a personal dogged resolve, concern for family and neighbors, and a scorn for the occupying forces which infuriated the more perceptive and sensitive among their German overlords.”¹¹⁵ The people of the tri-city area never got used to occupation. All three cities, but Lille in particular, were very close to the battle line. As Vernon Kellogg noted, the people, daily seeing English scout fliers and hearing English cannons always felt close to freedom.¹¹⁶ He further laments, “Two things, the difficulty about food and the feeling of the nearness to rescue, have kept them in more restlessness and perhaps intractable state than the inhabitants of other parts of the occupied territory.”¹¹⁷ Herbert Hoover’s analysis of life in occupied France was similar to Alan Kramer’s, “...[it] can be seen from all aspects as a vast concentration camp...”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ McPhail, 2.

¹¹⁶ Vernon Kellogg, “The Capture of Charleville,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 1918): 297.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Lyons, 91.

Chapter Three:

Impartial News: The First Casualty of War

Sophisticated government intervention into the media began with the First World War. All of the combatant nations utilized the main media source of the period – newspapers – to influence their citizens' morale. In France and Germany, newspapers became a vital tool used to circulate propaganda, as the warring nations realized they had to fight a psychological war simultaneously to the military one.¹ Such measures were necessary, as the French (and German) people needed to be fortified for further sacrifices, and this would not have been possible if they had known what actually was happening on the Western Front.² In both countries, government control of the media had two interwoven facets: censorship of information and the dissemination of propaganda. Both elements of government control worked together to alter greatly newspaper content during the war. Censorship can limit information but it can only help form opinions to a certain extent. To drive public opinion, governments entered into the realm of propaganda. Propaganda is only effective if the public's access to the unadulterated version of the truth is restricted; hence newspapers also had to be censored of other information to enable propaganda to be effective.³ Phillip Knightley describes the results, "And so began the great conspiracy. More deliberate lies were told than in any other period of history and the whole apparatus of the state went into action to suppress the

¹ George Bruntz, *Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, Hoover War Library Publications, N.13, 1938), vii.

² Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 84.

³ Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning: Propaganda in the First World War* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 2.

truth.”⁴ This chapter examines how the French and German governments utilized their nations’ presses to stimulate their people’s support for the war. This overview includes an examination of the various government and military bureaucracies created to control the press, how this control altered the character and content of newspapers, newspaper editors’ responses to government control, and how these systems compared to news manipulation in occupied France. First, this chapter provides working definitions of censorship and propaganda.

Definitions of Censorship and Propaganda

In the simplest terms, censorship is the control of information and ideas. The American Library Association provides a slightly narrower definition of censorship that explains the aims of the French and German governments during the First World War. The ALA defines censorship as “the suppression of ideas and information that certain persons – individuals, groups or government officials – find objectionable or dangerous.”⁵ Defining propaganda is slightly more problematic as many different definitions of the word exist. Philip Taylor, in his foreword to *The Encyclopedia of Propaganda*, captures the basic essence of propaganda; it “involves saying some things and avoiding saying others. Propaganda arranges arguments and impressions to achieve specific aims.”⁶ This dissertation employs the slightly more complex definition created by Jacques Ellul in the 1970s. He defined propaganda as “a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its

⁴ Knightley, 84.

⁵ www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureschock/whodecides/definitions.html. (accessed March 16, 2010),

⁶ Philip M. Taylor, “Foreword,” *The Encyclopedia of Propaganda*. Vol. 1, Robert Cole, ed. (NY: Sharpe Reference, 1998), xvi.

actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization.”⁷ This definition applies to the efforts of the French and German governments because it allows for passive participation goals, like simply not rioting about food shortages or not hindering conscription procedures. The lines can blur between censorship and propaganda, as censorship can frequently be an integral part of a propaganda campaign. Propaganda need not contain lies. It can report events accurately, but ignore or exclude other information to alter perceptions. World War I propaganda transformed news providing biased interpretations of events and reporting it as if it were impartial.

Information theorists explain how propaganda via newspapers reaches its audience in terms of the standard communication model of a sender relaying a message to the addressee, who decodes it based on a shared linguistic and cultural foundation.⁸ This model aptly describes the relationship between the French and German presses and their respective home fronts. However, this model does not allow for the subcommunicative intercoursures created by the sociocultural circumstances in which the message is emitted⁹, which can undermine the senders’ trustworthiness. In the case of occupied France receiving the majority of its news via German-controlled newspapers, the sociocultural circumstances included the German occupier’s desire to create a defeatist attitude amongst the French population. The readers’ knowledge of German intents colored their interpretations of news presented, making people in occupied France less susceptible to

⁷ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (NY: Vintage Books, 1973), 61.

⁸ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 5.

⁹ Ibid.

propaganda in newspapers than readers in the rest of France and Germany. To be effective, propaganda must be creditable in the environment in which it is projected.

French Control of the Press

The *Gazette de France*, appearing in 1631, was the country's first newspaper and marked the start of France's active press. For most of its history, the French press operated under strict government control, enjoying only brief moments of greater freedom until the Third Republic. A new press law then permitted close to complete liberty of expression, causing the number of daily and weekly newspapers in the country to double by 1900.¹⁰ This translated to 240 newspapers in Paris alone – more than any other city in the world – with 2,160 newspapers in the rest of the country.¹¹ These newspapers sold numerous copies. In 1870, the Parisian dailies enjoyed a circulation of a million issues daily – by 1910 that number rose to five million.¹² By 1914, France had a flourishing newspaper culture. Paris was home to fifty-seven daily newspapers, and the provinces contributed two hundred forty-two more. Waning in influence but still present were newspapers controlled by political parties or people with clear political views who utilized their newspapers to broadcast their viewpoints. Aimed at a larger audience were newspapers that offered both local and world news without any obvious political slant. These newspapers resembled the modern mass-circulation American newspaper of the time.¹³

¹⁰ Robert Desmond, *Windows on the World: World News Reporting 1900-1920* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1980), 184.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hutton, 2:690.

¹³ Ross Collins, "The Development of Censorship in World War I France," *Journalism Monographs* 131 (February 1992): 3.

Two other factors helped the newspaper boom. First, the 1860s saw the introduction of high-speed rotary presses in France. Newspapers became smaller in physical size, more diverse in content, and less expensive to both produce and purchase, based upon the tabloidal *Le Petit Journal* model. Second, the growth of cities, the popular press, and universal military service made French society more culturally homogeneous, and while France remained mostly rural, urban culture was widely diffused.¹⁴ Hence, the cultural infrastructure needed for wartime propaganda already existed, even if obstacles created by the Great War negatively affected the newspaper industry, and froze expansion of the press. Publishers faced their staffs' mobilization to fight and a shortage of raw materials. Economic conditions also affected the French press; thirty Parisian daily newspapers folded during the first few months of the war.¹⁵

The French Assembly's declaration of a state of siege in August 1914 activated the grand and intricate machinery of censorship that shaped the French press during the war. Regina Sweeney notes, "The immediate and relatively smooth imposition of the machine reflected not only the current government's wish to eliminate all subversive activity but also a collective memory of how the censoring mechanism had worked."¹⁶ France established a comprehensive bureaucracy aimed at controlling public opinion through the press. Even before the outbreak of fighting, the French Ministry of War distrusted the French press, finding its overall tone irresponsible and sensational. This cynicism toward the press developed out of the "Sedan disaster" of September 2, 1870, when German forces captured 83,000 French troops, including Napoleon III, in the

¹⁴ Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau, and Becker, 53.

¹⁵ Laska, 110.

¹⁶ Regina Sweeney, "*La pudique Anastasie: Wartime Censorship and French Bourgeois Morality*," in *World War I and the Cultures of Modernity*, Douglas Mackaman and Michael Mays, eds. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 5.

Ardennes department because they knew the French army's plans from reading them in *Le Temps*.¹⁷ Military leaders simply believed the war was too important to trust to journalists; they were only to act as conduits to relay information. This distrust demonstrated itself in the fact that none of the top military men – including Joseph Joffre, Henri-Philippe Pétain, and Ferdinand Foch – ever gave interviews.¹⁸

The principles of censorship pre-existed the outbreak of war and the law of 5 August 1914 simply strengthened them by prohibiting the publication of non-official military information. Prior to this law was the law of 8 August 1849 that permitted military authorities to disallow all publications that might excite or encourage disorder. The law of 29 July 1881 noted that the aforementioned publications included the newspaper press; hence, military authorities had the right to ban newspapers that might upset public order or have a negative influence on morale.¹⁹ The French parliament passed the Law of August 5, 1914 prior to adjourning. The law disallowed information published about: 1) troop and ship movements; 2) operations or mobilization; 3) number and composition of units; 4) lists of men not called up; 5) lists of men killed, wounded, or taken prisoner; 6) details about armaments and operations to move provisions; 7) sanitary operations; 8) changes in high command; 9) any news concerning military or diplomatic operations that might favor the enemy and have a negative influence on the morale or the army or the population.²⁰ The broad definition of the last category meant censors could invoke it to make any news article they wished disappear. As early as August 1914

¹⁷ Collins, "The Development of Censorship in World War One France," 4.

¹⁸ Bellanger, Godechot, Guiral and Terrou, 402.

¹⁹ Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 48.

²⁰ Collins, "The Development of Censorship in World War One France," 5.

General Joffre declared almost all information as news of a military nature, and consequently subject to restriction.

The French military envisioned the Agence Havas as playing an important official role in news distribution, similar to Reuters' position in England. Reuters, the British press agency, was a patriotic force during the war. Starting in the nineteenth century, Reuters proved loyal in its coverage of any wars involving British troops. Under the leadership of F.W. Dickinson, its chief editor during the Great War, the agency reconciled patriotism with journalistic objectivity. It never quoted information from German communiqués that carried news negative to British endeavors, and gave countenance to anti-German propaganda, although the agency couched it in terms of speculation, rather than confirming it as truth.²¹

In pre-war France, the Agence Havas dominated news service. Havas gained control early in the Third Republic, and by the late 1800s reached agreements with foreign agencies, most notably Reuters and Wolff, to share information and divide the world into geographic areas, regard by the group as each agency's exclusive market, with Havas receiving France, Spain, Italy, and Portugal.²² The French military wanted the French press to take war reports solely from Agence Havas, which would only provide such information as the military deemed acceptable. The military wanted to both censor Havas reports and disallow any critical comment of the war. The Agence Havas's management, while enthusiastic supporters of the war effort, were unwilling to accept

²¹ Donald Read, *The Power of News: The History of Reuters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 139-40.

²² K.M. Shrivastava, *News Agencies from Pigeon to Internet* (Elgin, IL: New Dawn Press, 2007), 13-4.

such an extreme relationship, so while Havas was a useful tool for the French military to release stories, it did not become the sole conduit of information for newspapers.²³

Havas was still central to the government control of news as it was a part of the larger Messageries Hachette Company, which handled the distribution of most French newspapers, particularly in the capital.²⁴

Utilizing law and control of distribution, the French government and military created an immense bureaucratic system to control and utilize the press in two manners. They began by censoring newspapers, preventing publication of information they did not want circulated, and grew to also influence newspapers to publish stories that authorities believed would sustain morale. The overall wartime propaganda /censorship machinery grew quickly and arbitrarily, often making the two arms of media control difficult to differentiate.

Censorship

A rather convoluted system of censorship developed in France. Ross Collins described it as the “two-headed censorship” system. Two ministries, the War Ministry and Interior Ministry jointly controlled the censorship apparatus. The War Ministry oversaw the Bureau de la presse, which supervised Paris publications and directed censorship commissions throughout the rest of France. Under the Interior Ministry were additional, provisional censorship commissions, located in prefectures and sub-prefectures, composed of military officers reporting to a regional military commander

²³ Desmond, 190.

²⁴ Ibid., 184.

and civilian censors chosen by the prefect.²⁵ Such close monitoring of the French press took an army of censors, which included a staff of hundreds, with a censorship bureau in every major French city.²⁶ Military censors oversaw censorship of military and diplomatic news, while the civilians covered the rest. The Ministry of the Interior's civilian censors focused upon articles covering domestic politics. Domestic politics quickly became a category under which any news critical of the authorities or potentially damaging to public morale fell. The military / civilian division of censorship labor showed signs of weakness in the provinces, as military and civilian censors did not always agree on what should be allowed published. Problems arose in 1915 and disagreements lingered for two years until 1917, when the military eliminated all civilian authority on censorship commissions.²⁷

General Joseph Joffre denied reporters access to the front and provided no communiqués for over a month at the start of the war. Hence, early in the war French editors, needing to fill their newspapers with information the public demanded, borrowed from foreign newspapers and focused and expanded upon any detail of information they managed to attain. By the end of August 1914, the French military command began issuing daily communiqués and in October 1914, the French high command formed the Service d'Information. Based in Chantilly under the direction of journalist André Tardieu, it prepared positive stories from the front and distributed them to the press. This created a press that felt relatively informed. However, of these daily communiqués issued by the French army, Phillip Knightley writes, "Th[ey] were crisp, beautifully written, and punctually presented, but, unfortunately, they were closer to fiction than to fact, and

²⁵ Collins, "The Development of Censorship in World War One France," 12.

²⁶ Ibid., 1.

²⁷ Ibid., 13.

while Germany's best armies were crashing through Belgium these communiqués continued to report French army advances on the Alsace-Lorraine frontier as if it would be only a matter of weeks before the Allies were in Berlin."²⁸ Therefore, while French newspapers' reporting on political aspects of the war may have differed, their reporting of battles and German and French military behavior were effectively indistinguishable as they all relied on the same military communiqués.²⁹ As Jean-Jacques Becker notes, whether a reader consulted *L'Humanité*, the organ of the Socialist Party, or the *L'Echo de Paris*, a right-wing, militarist and Catholic newspaper, that reader learned of poor German morale, German cruelty, as they were compared to the strength of the French military cause.³⁰

During that first month of war, the press appeared to support unanimously the censorship guidelines and accepted the Bureau de la presse as necessary.³¹ The press even formed the Commission de la presse under the leadership of Jean Dupuy, the publisher of France's largest daily newspaper, *Le Petit Parisien*, on August 13, 1914, to act as a liaison between the media and the government. This act was not surprising, as prior to the war, the press suggested censorship guidelines, perhaps as part of the "first emotional flush of *Union sacrée*."³² Newspaper editors allowed censors continual access

²⁸ Knightley, 90.

²⁹ Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, 39.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Collins, "The Development of Censorship in World War One France," 6.

³² Ibid. The term *Union sacrée* was first used by President Poincaré in a speech made August 4, 1914 during which he stated, "[France] will be heroically defended by all her sons; nothing will break their sacred union before the enemy..." American Society for International Law, "Message from M. Poincaré, President of the Republic, read at the Extraordinary session of Parliament, August, 4, 1914," *The American Journal of International Law*: 9 (1915): 291-93. The term quickly became shorthand for the feelings of unity Frenchmen shared at the outbreak of war. Internal differences between the left and right and religious and civil forces were put aside as the country focused upon the war and all agreed to support the government's efforts. Prime Minister René Viviani even enlarged his war cabinet to include two socialists, Jules Guesde and Marcel Sembat. Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 29.

to their proof sheets³³, giving government censors the ability to slash any items deemed offensive. While the newspaper editors “allowed” these censors access, it should be noted that the censors had the authority to close without trial any newspapers they deemed to run truly offensive material.³⁴ This encouraged newspapers to self-regulate. Editors accepted censorship because they believed the war would be brief, and censorship would only affect matters of military and diplomatic news. Furthermore, the government never discussed punishments for publishing news unacceptable to it, and it surprised the media that the government, rather than the legislature, interpreted the press laws. As it quickly became clear that the government planned to interpret the law in a severe way, censoring any criticism of its actions, newspaper editors quickly became disenchanted with what they rightfully saw as political censorship.³⁵

The reaction of the French press was mixed. Despite the strict regulations placed upon them, many in the French press did not chafe under governmental control. Quite to the contrary, the *Union sacrée* moved them and they agreed to most terms. Many editors did commit the small rebellious act of leaving black spaces in newspapers to show where censored news items would have been. While censors preferred not to leave such blanks, they did appear throughout the war. For example, in 1918, the year that saw the most information censored in *Le Petit Provençal*, ninety-five blanks appeared in that paper.³⁶

³³ In the provinces, newspapers even gave censors space in their newsrooms. Originally the newspaper staffs brought their proof sheets to censor’s offices but newspaper editors quickly complained that this set-up made it difficult to keep printing deadlines. Censors agreed to begin working out of the newspaper offices. The exception to the censor placement was in Paris, where most of the newspaper offices were gathered on rue de Croissant and rue Montmartre, so the paper’s staffs simply brought their proof sheets to the nearby Bureau de la presse, located under three kilometers away at 110 rue de Grenelle. Collins, “The Development of Censorship in World War One France,” 12.

³⁴ Ibid., 1.

³⁵ Ibid., 6.

³⁶ Ibid., 9.

Despite the large number of censored news stories, there were never any articles completely opposed to the war effort published in French newspapers during the war.³⁷

It took only a little over a month after the press law passed for a newspaper to be suspended. The first well-documented case of the government suspending a newspaper was that of Georges Clemenceau's *L'Homme Libre*. Clemenceau, outraged at the unhygienic conditions of trains returning from the front with wounded soldiers, wrote an article denouncing the trains. A sympathetic censor by the name of Marius Richard allowed the paper to publish the article, leading to the suspension.³⁸ Clemenceau tried to keep publishing during the suspension, renaming his paper *L'Homme Enchaîné*, but censors recognized the name swap. Clemenceau became the leading anti-censorship voice of the French press, and hence his newspapers became the largest target for censorship. Interestingly, when Clemenceau became prime minister in October 1917 he continued the government's control of the press.³⁹

Clemenceau was not alone in his anger over censorship. By 1915, their fury over political censorship seemly unified French journalists. The political editor of *Le Petit Provençal* wrote in the June 23, 1915, issue of his paper, "The entire industry is going to end up in unanimous revolt if the good sense and fairness of the government does not decide to put an end to this abuse."⁴⁰ Gustave Hervé, editor *La Guerre sociale*, pointed out that censorship had underpinned the likes of dictators and monarchs. Franc-Nohan of the *Echo de Paris* suggested that at least one aim of censorship was to help the military

³⁷ Oliver Forcade, "Dans l'oeil de la censure: Voir ou ne pas voir la guerre," in *Vrai et Faux dans la Grande Guerre*, ed. Christopher Prochasson and Anne Rasmussen (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 2004), 38.

³⁸ Collins, "The Development of Censorship in World War One France," 11.

³⁹ Georges Clemenceau's relationship with censors both as an editor and later as prime minister was extremely complex. For greater detail, see David Newhall, *Clemenceau: A Life at War* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1991). In particular, Newhall notes that while Clemenceau kept a tight control on military and diplomatic news, he abolished censorship of political criticism of his ministry, 365.

⁴⁰ Collins, "The Development of Censorship in World War One France," 13.

High Command avoid embarrassment. Alfred Capus of the Academié française wrote in *Le Figaro* that censorship taken too far could undermine the very liberties France was founded upon.⁴¹ Capus also lamented in the pages of *Le Figaro*, “Providing one does not mention the authorities, the government, politics, registered companies, banks, the wounded, German atrocities, or the postal services one may print anything freely with the blessings of two or three censors.”⁴²

Censored articles from that period have not been preserved, so history does not know every item that was expunged prior to newspapers going to press. However, we do know that censors cut certain stories, such as those about British pits closing down for a lack of miners, and German submarines carrying out successful missions.⁴³ The French government told censors to block almost all news related to the Russian Revolution, as one of France’s major allies experienced a leadership overhaul. Censors disallowed critical comments about the French cause, as well as any stories about the favorable treatment of French prisoners of war. Furthermore, censors forbid French newspapers to publish German communiqués.⁴⁴ There could also be no reference to peace efforts: censors eliminated coverage of President Wilson’s speech in which he referred to himself as a “champion of world peace.”⁴⁵ When Catholic newspapers within France attempted

⁴¹ Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, 54-5.

⁴² Quoted in Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, 55.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁴ Kent Cooper, *The Right to Know: An Exposition of the Evils of News Suppression and Propaganda* (NY: Farrar, Straus, & Cudahy, 1956), 90-91. In contrast, British newspapers were at times allowed to print German communiqués, such as reports of the German foray in Belgium. The British theory was that this would arouse a spirit of resistance amongst its people. It was also part of the larger British propaganda plan to warn the world that civilization faced destruction at the hands of the German enemy.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

to publish Pope Benedict's prayer for peace, censors ordered those issues seized.⁴⁶ Censors also expurgated articles espousing excessive optimism. For example, reports proclaiming the return of government from Bordeaux to Paris in 1914 as a sign that the tide was about to turn never appeared in print, for the military did not want to create short-term expectations that could not be met. Rather, "censors preferred to encourage an atmosphere of resigned acceptance of a conflict that must inevitably continue for some considerable time..."⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, different newspapers had different types of articles cut by the censors. Censored articles from *Le Temps* tended to be reporting diplomatic news, which made sense as the newspaper boasted a large corps of international reporters relaying numerous diplomatic stories. *La Guerre sociale*, with a politically passionate editor, saw numerous articles reporting upon French politics censored.⁴⁸

Over time the censor's grip on the French press tightened, not due to the press taking more liberties, but rather in response to new ministerial instructions. As early as September 1914, Minister of War Alexandre Millerand greatly extended censors' prerogatives, to blatantly include political censorship.⁴⁹ On September 30, 1915, the government published a twenty-eight page confidential book, known as Circular No. 1,000, which attempted to answer any question a diligent censor could ask. An example of directives includes not extolling the value of African troops to the detriment of other troops and allowing moderate criticism on the function of censorship to go to publication

⁴⁶ James F. McMillan, "French Catholics: *Rumeurs infâmes* and the *Union Sacrée*, 1914-1918," in *Authority, Identity, and the Social History of the Great War*, Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee, eds. (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995), 119-20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁸ Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, 52.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

but never articles attacking a particular censor.⁵⁰ The French cabinet quickly took offense at the military direction of political censorship, and had responsibility for said censorship transferred to prefectorial authorities, but this did nothing to lessen the censors' control over the media.⁵¹ Amazingly, the government denied political censorship occurred, stating that all censorship fell under the articles of the Law of August 5, 1914. But censorship, a form of news management scholars define as negative control, was supplemented by what they call positive control of news, that is propaganda.

Propaganda

The French system of censorship developed immediately; its network of propaganda evolved more slowly. Like the censoring bureaucracy, both military and civilian arms of the government worked – at times at odds and customarily without any inter-agency cohesiveness – to produce propaganda. In certain cases, propaganda was a planned end, and in other cases it simply flowed out of systemic censorship.

The military Service d'information was primarily concerned with providing censored communiqués that would be the sole source of combat information for French newspapers. Many would argue that propaganda production might not have been its main objective, but the S.I.'s public relations campaign did verge into that domain. It prepared positive stories from the front and distributed them to the press. Tardieu wrote a great deal of the news released by the army himself, but he also created a system of officer-correspondents stationed with French armies on the Western Front. In 1915, these officer-correspondents published numerous human-interest stories in French newspapers while

⁵⁰ Collins, "The Development of Censorship in World War One France," 16.

⁵¹ Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, 54.

ignoring the horrifying truths of life in the trenches.⁵² These stories went beyond censorship, creating a false description of trench life for readers on the home front. The system broke down however, whenever combat occurred. The journalists were soldiers first, and hence during battles – when the home front most wanted information – they were busy fighting rather than writing. For example, when the Germans attacked the Verdun fortifications in February 1916, no soldiers were available to write and counter-act the terrifying rumors circulating on the home front. The army quickly invoked a new plan: it created a small group of soldier-journalists whose duties entailed only covering the war. These reporters were the only ones covering battles for French newspapers because the military disallowed civilian correspondents at the front.⁵³ These military journalists provided the only French coverage of Verdun for four months and created an image of French resistance at Verdun that encouraged the civilian population with their sanitized version of events.⁵⁴ By all assessments, these reporters provided French newspapers with well-crafted articles and proved to be solid writers, but their military-approved articles hardly produced the unbiased reporting independent journalists would have provided.

Despite the relative success of the Service d'information, the military reduced its journalistic activity toward the end of 1916. Then on May 14, 1917, the French high command complained to the Service d'information that French newspapers were covering more British operations than French ones because the newspaper editors seemed to prefer to copy articles from British newspapers than to print material sent to them by

⁵² Cole, 1:879.

⁵³ Collins, "The Development of Censorship in World War One France," 17.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

the Service d'information.⁵⁵ The French military decided to allow civilian journalists access to the front for the first time.⁵⁶ The S.I. took this complaint and negation of its function to claim a greater propaganda role. The Service d'information split into two divisions, one that kept its old name and one that became the Bureau d'information militaire. Both sections expanded beyond simply writing articles to also producing photography, films, briefings to reporters, radio transmissions, daily communiqués, and even starting an army newspaper, the *Bulletin des Armées*.⁵⁷ All of these sources portrayed war events as the military high command wished the home front to see them.

Despite the dominance of the military, the French civilian government did contribute to the distribution of propaganda. In October 1915, Aristide Briand became Minister of Foreign Affairs, and he promptly began plans for a central propaganda office. In January 1916, the French government established the Maison de la presse in Paris. With funding attained from a stash of twenty-five million gold francs from secret service funds,⁵⁸ it became the agency for the management of propaganda, slowly merging all other small organizations into its fold. This organization aimed to help not only the French press, but also the world media understand the war from the French point of view. It contained four offices: the diplomatic department, the military department, the department of translation and analysis of the foreign press, and the propaganda department. The propaganda department contained three sub-sections, dealing with allied countries, neutral countries, and general ideas. Philippe Berthelot was in charge of the entire operation. By 1917, the Maison de la Presse was the clearinghouse for all the

⁵⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁶ Cole, 1:879-80.

⁵⁷ Collins, "The Development of Censorship in World One France," 18.

⁵⁸ Knightley, 87.

government's propaganda efforts, nationally, but mainly internationally. While the Bureau de la presse continued to function, in a surprise case of civilian-military cooperation, the military channeled most its information through the Maison. Working in conjunction with army headquarters, known as the Grand Quartier Général (GQG), the Bureau also relayed captured German diaries and letters of propaganda value to the papers.⁵⁹ While the Maison de la presse provided military news, the Bureau de la presse circulated more political information. When Clemenceau took power in October 1917, he placed the Section militaire under the Minister of War. Clouding the divisions between negative and positive control, the Maison also began responding to journalists' questions about censorship.⁶⁰

The efforts of these agencies meant that the press created a distorted picture of the war. The journalists over-romanticized the war, provided optimistic reviews of military operations, and glamorized French soldiers while demeaning German fighters.⁶¹ Soldiers home on leave were shocked at the false ideas civilians had from reading the newspapers. The term *bourrage-de-crâne* described the lies and exaggerations many readers believed filled the newspapers of the First World War. In his study of Parisian dailies during the first few months of the war, Ross Collins established five categories or types of such propaganda. The first type includes patriotic items, extolling the glory and justness of the French cause and its purifying effect on the national spirit. The inspiration for such articles was the pre-war writings of young conservatives, such as Charles Maurras and

⁵⁹ Bruntz, 14.

⁶⁰ Collins, "The Development of Censorship in World War One France," 19.

⁶¹ John Williams, *The Other Battleground: The Home Fronts Britain, France, and Germany, 1914-1918* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1972), 146.

Maurice Barrès and others associated with of the group Action française.⁶² The second form of propaganda described the French troops in exaggeratingly heroic terms. Such coverage described the brave *poilus*, fearing neither bullets nor shells, enjoying both easy victories over a pusillanimous enemy and the somewhat pleasant life of comradeship in the trenches.⁶³ Such coverage angered many troops as it minimized the difficulty of their experience. The third category of propaganda focused upon defamation of the Germans, including accusations of atrocities and slurs on their character and culture. Collins simply calls the fourth type of propaganda outrageous lies, including the numerous false statements reported in French newspapers during the war. He notes that bold falsehoods, such as, “Cossacks Marching to Berlin,” “Kaiser dying,” and “French troops routing Germans,” frequently appeared in the form of headlines.⁶⁴ The final category of misleading information demonstrates how the lines between censorship and propaganda blurred during the war, for this fifth type was missing information. Propaganda in the form of what was not reported, namely bad news for the French war effort, or censorship. Keeping negative information from readers was as important as exaggerating good news. Prior to Collins’s work, Jean-Jacques Becker identified six reoccurring topics printed in the French press: the French spirit as a combination of panache and a Spartan work ethic; German immorality; German spitefulness and ruthlessness; the pre-eminence of French weaponry; the superiority of French soldiers; and Russian potency.⁶⁵ The findings of these two men reveal the nature of the majority of news stories published in French newspapers during the war.

⁶² Ross Collins, “Cossacks Marching to Berlin!: A New Look at French Journalism during the First World War,” *American Journalism*: 18(2002): 32.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁵ Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, 41.

While this type of coverage reflected the omnipresent influence of military and civilian censorship and propaganda efforts, the newspaper editors coveted news to publish that would sell their papers. The greatness of France fighting an evil enemy sold newspapers. Sordid, explicit news also sold newspapers; hence, the French press was eager to include atrocity propaganda. As James Moran Read notes, “they seized the opportunity to publish sensational murder stories, accompanied by all the lurid details, without being accused of pandering to the lower instincts of the crowd.”⁶⁶ Indeed, both sides in the war committed numerous atrocities, but fewer actual atrocities were committed than the average newspaper reader would have thought by 1919.⁶⁷ The overuse of atrocity stories had a disheartening effect. When Henri Barby of Paris’s *Le Journal* accurately reported the atrocities that the Turks committed against the Armenians, the story was lost among all the false and exaggerated propaganda that was filling newspapers at the time.⁶⁸

The authors of *Histoire générale de la presse française* assert that the war reduced French newspapers to mediocrity.⁶⁹ Newspapers, did however, succeed for the most part in reassuring the home front, albeit through concealment of the direness of the national situation.⁷⁰ The French non-combatant population wanted to be convinced of the righteousness of the French cause and to be assured of an eventual victory. Hence, it was ready to believe the propaganda present in French papers, even if common sense would have made it reject it at other times.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Read, *Atrocity Propaganda*, 13.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁸ Knightley, 111.

⁶⁹ Bellanger, Godechot, Guiral and Terrou, 407.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 426.

⁷¹ Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, 42.

German Control of the Press

Wilhelmine Germany had a rich newspaper culture, with over 3,600 newspapers published within the country, but newspaper producers did not enjoy the freedom to publish uninhibited.⁷² An 1874 press law assured a certain amount of press freedom, but it still permitted government restraints that continued to limit the press.⁷³ Article 68 of the 1871 German constitution put the press into war service, and a treason law of June 3, 1914 outlined the government's right to censor printed material.⁷⁴ The Prussian law of siege of 1851 also applied to the German press during wartime. Implemented the first day of German mobilization during the First World War, it granted astonishing powers to the commanding generals of each of the twenty-six military districts of the Reich, that German military interpreted to include its control over what newspapers published.⁷⁵ An interesting peculiarity of German journalism also shaped the nature of German war coverage. Whereas in France, several newspapers' political slant defined them, in Germany, some newspapers were controlled, or even completely owned by the government. In the case of both countries, audiences of these newspapers were aware of the relationship of politics and the papers.

On July 31, 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm II declared a "state of siege," which lasted until November 1918. It suspended the "right to express opinion freely by word, print, or

⁷² Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 15.

⁷³ Desmond, 190.

⁷⁴ Laska, 103.

⁷⁵ Hew Strachan, "From Cabinet War to Total War: The Perspective of Military Doctrine, 1861-1918," in *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 24.

picture.”⁷⁶ It placed executive authority in the hands of the commanders of the twenty-six military districts, who answered only to the Kaiser, as they monitored political activity, and censored the press, mail, and public meetings.⁷⁷ Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg issued twenty-six prohibitions to the press, “to prevent unreliable information from reaching the public.”⁷⁸ He justified the drastic action with the fear that newspapers would publish sensitive military information. Control of censorship became the purview of the military. During the first months of the First World War, district military commanders assumed control over the domestic administration of Germany, which included issuing directives for the local press. Almost all domestic issues were deemed of military importance, as almost all news might either relate to the economic war effort, hearten Germany’s enemies, and conversely dishearten Germans, undermine the populace’s faith in their government, or in other ways destroy the country’s wartime solidarity.⁷⁹

If the French military could only rely upon the Agence Havas to disseminate French propaganda within limits, the German military could expect the Wolff news agency to publish whatever they wanted. Established in Berlin in 1849 by Dr. Bernhard Wolff, it was the source of world news reports for German newspapers. It began as the Berlin Telegraphische Anstalt, distributing commercial information until 1855, when it also entered the general news field. In 1865, it joined with the Continental Telegraphen Compagnie, and gained Prussian governmental support, becoming a quasi-official news

⁷⁶ Alice Goldfarb Marquis, “Words as Weapons: Propaganda in Britain and Germany during the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 13 (July 1978): 470.

⁷⁷ Gary Stark, “All Quiet on the Home Front: Popular Entertainments, Censorship and Civilian Morale in Germany, 1914-1918,” in *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*, Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee, eds. (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995): 60.

⁷⁸ Marquis, 470.

⁷⁹ Stark, 60.

service.⁸⁰ Until 1859 the Wolff, Havas, and Reuters agencies shared information and after 1870 were all part of the alliance of news agencies referred to as the “ring combination.” Each agency had territory in which they had exclusive rights to distribution; Wolff’s included the German empire, Austria-Hungary, and much of northern and southern Europe.⁸¹ Despite acting and been treated like a major international news player, Wolff never kept pace with Reuters or Havas in terms of having correspondents throughout the world. Wolff never had journalists outside its territories beyond those in a few major world capitals. The spirit of cooperation between the services, upon which Wolff relied for news outside its area, slowly diminished, however, as the war approached, and the Wolff agency became a propagator of the German government’s agenda.⁸² While the Wolff agency garnered almost all its news from military sources, newspapers could run articles provided by Wolff or cite the agency as a source and make it appear that it was news relatively independent of the military.

German Censorship

In February 1915, the German military created Oberzensursteille, or the Central Office of Censorship. Eight months later, the military moved it under the Kriegspresseamt, or War Press Office, overseen by Lieutenant-Colonel Erhard Deutelmoser. In turn, the Information and Espionage Bureau, known as IIIb and controlled by Commander Walter Nicolai, controlled this office.⁸³ These agencies only allowed newspapers to publish military news given as bare statements by the

⁸⁰ Desmond, 189-91.

⁸¹ Ibid., 191.

⁸² Ibid., 192.

⁸³ Laska, 103.

Kriegspresseamt, which convened with editors three times a week at the Reichstag.⁸⁴ Numerous people filtered news before it reached the press. Field units submitted reports to staff headquarters on the Eastern and Western Fronts, and the reports were then forwarded to general staff headquarters in Berlin, where the army's press department sanitized them prior to making the information available to newspapers at these thrice-weekly conferences.⁸⁵ As the German military forbid their country's journalists from coming near the front, these meetings were the only source of battlefield news. The General Staff instructed the officer conducting the press conferences to remember one point: the key element is not the accuracy of the news presented but the effect it will have on the reading population.⁸⁶ A corps of officer correspondents, overseen by the Kriegspresseamt, provided the bulk of information most military communiqués were based upon.⁸⁷ Newspapers throughout German published identical reports of battlefield operations.⁸⁸ Not surprisingly, disheartening news did not have a place in these reports.

Even with complete control of combat news, the military still deemed it necessary to censor numerous articles. Censored news pieces included those concerning food shortages, casualty lists, notices of death, and peace demonstrations. In all areas, the only leniency allowed in voicing dissent was at the local level; officials who oversaw municipal rationing could be criticized for food shortages, but never military or civilian leaders in Berlin.⁸⁹ Germany, like France, had newspapers bent on challenging the government, with the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), *Vorwärts*, being

⁸⁴ Williams, 24.

⁸⁵ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47.

⁸⁶ Knightley, 90.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Chickering, 47.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 49.

comparable to France's *L'Humanité*, the organ of the French Socialist Party (SFIO). Both suffered from their respective censors' pens numerous times.

Despite tight military control, inconsistency plagued German censorship efforts until 1917 when centralization of the different press offices occurred. Until that point, newspapers received direction from both the aforementioned military censors, and also the Ministry of Foreign Affairs information bureau, the Nachrichtenabteilung, controlled by Otto Hammann, and the Prussian Interior Minister's press bureau.⁹⁰ Even then, the power held by local military commanders to decide what area newspapers could publish allowed variation in items censored.⁹¹ Censorship was most stringent in Berlin, the Rhineland, and Westphalia, areas under the control of the Third and Seventh Army Corps, while regulations tended to be relatively more lax in Bavaria.⁹² These differences stemmed from the federal nature of Germany, leading to deputy commanding generals in different military districts interpreting censorship directives differently. The result was that Germany did a far less satisfactory job than France (which could utilize its historic centralization of state functions) to control the flow of information consistently through the country. In Germany, local editors attempted to make sense of the reports they received, often injecting contentious issues of domestic and foreign policy that local censors may have allowed but that the military did not intend to be included.⁹³

In general, military censorship created an information chasm between a minority of well-informed policymakers and the majority of civilians and military personnel, who only know what censored newspapers relayed. However, censorship of newspapers did

⁹⁰ Laska, 104.

⁹¹ Eberhard Demm, "Propaganda and Caricature in the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 28 (January 1993):164-5.

⁹² Chickering, 49.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 48.

not prevent all domestic knowledge of war news. War postcards proliferated and often escaped the notice of censors, disseminating images of the war to millions of people back in Germany.⁹⁴ Even though no German domestic newspaper reported a single German defeat until 1918, these reports did not fool the home front into believing this was the case.⁹⁵ The deprivations of their daily lives and the number of men killed at the front (even if not reported in the papers) made obvious to German readers how poorly the war was going. In their general history of the twentieth century, Geoffrey Bruun and Victor Mametey note, “the ultimate defeat of the Central Powers was greatly aided by the breakdown of morale on their home fronts...”⁹⁶

German Propaganda

The German government honed its ability to manipulate media before 1914, as it utilized newspapers to propagate and bolster its ambitious military and naval programs.⁹⁷ Charles Roetter believes, however, that prior to the war Germany did not have anything close to a coordinated propaganda effort. Even in August 1914, the German leadership felt the rightfulness of their cause was so self-evident it did not need any justification. Furthermore, they believed the war would not become lengthy enough to justify such efforts. It was only with the German disaster at the Marne and with it the prospect of a long war, that the Foreign Office began producing propaganda material in a haphazard fashion. This was not suitably coordinated with other official bodies, including the military, which late in 1914 developed an extensive press service to report military

⁹⁴ Jeffrey R. Smith, “The First World War and the Public Sphere in Germany,” 69.

⁹⁵ Chickering, 48.

⁹⁶ Geoffrey Bruun and Victor S. Mametey, *The World in the Twentieth Century*, 4th ed. (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1962), 163.

⁹⁷ Cooper, 81-2.

operations, carry out propaganda, and control what newspapers reached soldiers at the front.⁹⁸

Newspaper editors in Germany – like France – were expected not only to limit negative news, but also to ensure their papers had a patriotic tone.⁹⁹ In early 1915, the Imperial Ministry of War provided the German press with the following recommendations: 1) do not question the national sentiment or determination of any German because it injures the impression of German unity; 2) disseminate the idea that German victory will liberate Europe and other areas from Russian despotism and English hegemony; 3) harsh language may be used to describe the enemy but belittling the enemy is not dignified; 4) neither the Chancellor, Kaiser, or military leaders can be criticized but deserve our confidence.¹⁰⁰ For further guidance, the Oberzensursteille had a process for generating “positive press,” attitudes in, the Berliner Pressekonferenzen, or Berlin Press Conferences, during which military censors provided detailed instructions to the press on how to treat different questions raised by the war.¹⁰¹ The Kriegspresseamt also made attempts at blatant propaganda. It prepared and distributed periodicals, subsidized pro-German pamphlets, and sponsored books that advanced the German point of view.

The over-arching theme of German propaganda was to justify the German war effort by showing that Russia mobilized first, the French invaded German territory, and above all that the spiteful British wanted to destroy an economic rival whose commercial and naval superiority was looming.¹⁰² The military also encouraged newspapers to remember and report the “spirit of 1914,” so named for the first week of August, 1914,

⁹⁸ Charles Roetter, *The Act of Psychological Warfare, 1914-1945* (New York: Stein and Day, 1974), 37-9.

⁹⁹ Stark, 73.

¹⁰⁰ Marquis, 481.

¹⁰¹ Laska, 104.

¹⁰² Knightley, 98.

when the German people were moved by feelings of patriotism that caused them to embrace the war and inspired feelings of fraternity and community. Later the “spirit of 1914,” – including its expression in German newspapers – was invoked as both an experience and a goal, as a “holy memory” and a vision of a “utopian future” that would exist when Germany won the war.¹⁰³

German propaganda attempts never quite matched the success of those of the French. Thanks in large part to the French (and British) media much of the world believed that the Germans were the aggressors. Few newspaper editors in France thought twice about utilizing ethnic slurs, referring to the Germans as “Huns” or “Boche”; the Germans’ witty epithet of the Allies being the “All-Lies,” never caught on in the same manner.¹⁰⁴ While Germany may have lamented the atrocities French newspapers accused it of, it did not mean that the German government did not encourage its own country’s papers to print similar stories about the British and French. These stories shocked the German people, but in the battle for world public opinion, the French wielded a great deal more power.¹⁰⁵ For example, the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, a leading Berlin daily from 1861 till 1918, which had been the official organ of Bismarck’s government, reported on December 1, 1914, that Gurkha and Sikh troops (fighting for the British) liked to sneak across the battle lines at night and slit German throats and drink their blood.¹⁰⁶ For much of the war there were no foreign soldiers on German soil apart from a small part of Alsace, so German propagandists could not claim Allied soldiers were committing atrocities on civilians like those of which the Germans stood accused in

¹⁰³ Verhey, 4-5.

¹⁰⁴ Knightley, 86.

¹⁰⁵ Read, *Atrocity Propaganda*, 142.

¹⁰⁶ Knightley, 87.

Belgium and northern France. The only counter propaganda they could produce was to present a positive image of German soldiers. Most of their propaganda was defensive in nature, hence less successful. The exception to this rule: the German military frequently focused upon the actions of Belgian *franc-tireurs*, utilizing this imaginary threat to turn their invading army into victims.

Another example of Germany's unsuccessful defensive propaganda surrounded the deportation of people from their homes in occupied France around Easter 1916. The situation, as we have seen, was horrible enough to demand unexaggerated outrage, but the French press manipulated it into the sacrilegious mistreatment of girls and young women. The German military tried to respond through German newspapers. In the August 1, 1916, issue of the semiofficial *Kölnische Zeitung* it was remarked that not a single deported worker lost his life (a statement open to interpretation), while English shells and bombs killed dozens of French and Belgians in the occupied zone. The August 25, 1916, issue elaborated on occupied France, suggesting that, "The French should be thankful that the Germans and not the English were in northern France. If one could judge by the Boer War, the whole population would be sitting behind barbed wire, were the English in the place of the Germans."¹⁰⁷

The German propaganda machine also handled the Edith Cavell case poorly. The Germans executed Edith Cavell, a British nurse in a hospital in Brussels, on October 12, 1915, after she admitted to helping Allied servicemen escape the occupied zone, an act widely known to be punishable by death. The French and British media praised Cavell as a martyr and violently denounced the Germans as vile women-killers in their media. The German rebuttal in their media was feeble; they complained that Edith Cavell was an

¹⁰⁷ Read, *Atrocity Propaganda*, 170.

enemy citizen committing acts she knew were punishable by death, but made little of the fact that the French had already executed one woman for the same offense and were to put to death another eight for capital offenses during the course of the war.¹⁰⁸

The Press in the Occupied Zone

Newspapers in northern France in the few months between the outbreak of war and occupation particularly felt the effects of war. On August 3, 1914, the editors of the main regional papers, including *L’Echo du Nord*, *La Dépêche de Lille*, *La Croix du Nord*, *Le Réveil du Nord*, and *Le Progrès du Nord* placed their newspapers at the service of the civilian and military authorities. Others ceased publication entirely.¹⁰⁹ The newspapers that continued publishing represented greatly varying outlooks - from the republican *L’Echo du Nord* and *Le Progrès du Nord*, to the clerical *La Croix du Nord*, and the bourgeois Catholic *La Dépêche de Lille*, to the socialist *Le Réveil du Nord* - but they all followed the government wartime line. Indeed, on October 9, 1914, during the midst of a successful German attack on the capital of Flanders, *Le Progrès du Nord* reported the situation as “in general, excellent,” and the same day *Le Réveil du Nord* stated that the enemy was retreating south of Arras.¹¹⁰ The people of northern France quickly felt the repercussions of French media restrictions. Trying to avoid panic in the northern cities, the government ordered newspapers to say nothing of the August 20, 1914, German occupation of Brussels. Citizens of northern France found this out only when Belgian refugees arrived in French towns on August 24, telling of the horrors they had

¹⁰⁸ Knightley, 86.

¹⁰⁹ Buffton, 27.

¹¹⁰ Jean-Paul Visse, *La Presse du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais au temps de L’Echo du Nord: 1819-1944* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004), 192.

experienced and creating a sense of panic in their region.¹¹¹ Deprived of accurate news in their own press, citizens of northern France soon were subjected to the press of the occupier.

The purpose of this dissertation is to ascertain what news was available and through what newspapers during the occupation. As we shall see, the German-authorized newspapers in occupied France provided a great deal of information, but with it came a view of life as the Germans *wished* the French to see it, including who was to blame for the war.¹¹² Censors allowed different news within Germany and areas occupied by their forces. For example, in occupied areas and neutral countries, newspapers published stories of Entente forces' cruelty toward wounded German soldiers to anger people and to cause them to question their own nation's military. Such stories did not appear in German newspapers, for fear they would disquiet families with young men at the front.¹¹³ To these stories of Entente atrocities, German propaganda in occupied enemy countries added stories designed to encourage defeatism and despair. Thus, we will find in the press in occupied France the certainty of German victory, news of disaffection among the Entente powers due to divergent war aims, and of nationalist and revolutionary movements within the British and Russian empires.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Buffton, 28.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Wolfgang Iser, *Literature at War, 1914-1918: Representing the "Time of Greatness" in Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 44.

¹¹⁴ Lutz, 501.

Conclusion

News management was necessary in both wartime Germany and France, as it was in the interest of security as well as public morale. Through neutral countries or captured soldiers, or even spies, published news could easily find its way into enemy hands.¹¹⁵ However, keeping details of military operations out of the public sphere immediately descended into censorship of all sorts of information and the insertion in to the press of propaganda. Propaganda was effective during the war thanks to the relative unpreparedness of its receivers. Average newspaper readers in Paris or Berlin hardly knew what the word “propaganda” meant; they had no other sources analyzing the propaganda published in newspapers and elsewhere.¹¹⁶ They were willing to believe wartime propaganda that “stripped the enemy of any vestiges of humanity and appeared to confirm the worst suspicions and fears of the prewar era.”¹¹⁷ While Germany may have been the country with the authoritarian traditions, it was France that most efficiently controlled an omnipresent and organized press.

France established a comprehensive bureaucracy aimed at controlling public opinion through the press. French government and military leaders believed this system of censorship and propaganda as central to the country’s ability to sustain moral through the war.¹¹⁸ In newspapers as dissimilar as *L’Humanité* (the newspaper of the Socialist Party) and the *Echo de Paris* (a militarist and Catholic right-wing paper), parallel accounts of poor German morale, German cruelty, and shoddy German equipment

¹¹⁵ Chickering, 47.

¹¹⁶ Read, *Atrocity Propaganda*, 2.

¹¹⁷ Michael Nolan, *The Inverted Mirror: Mythologizing the Enemy in France and Germany, 1898-1914* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 3.

¹¹⁸ Collins, “The Development of Censorship in World War I France,” 1.

prevailed.¹¹⁹ Regaining Alsace and Lorraine was a paramount theme, often supplemented with versions of a post-war France annexing all the territories on the left bank of the Rhine.¹²⁰ Depoliticizing the war and ensuring a pro-war stance was not enough for French authorities. The war provided occasion to continue earlier efforts to disseminate middle-class values of clean language, a discriminating sense of humor, and proper behavior, at the expense of a working-class culture. “The goal of civilian morale dictated attention to morality.”¹²¹ Despite the resources the French poured into creating propaganda, historians’ opinions on the success of the program are mixed. Leonard Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker contend that the French censorship/ propaganda apparatus never became a truly creative force that could give meaning to the war.¹²² Instead, they note it was journalists, teachers, actors, popular singers, photographers, painters, designers, industrialists, and others that defined war culture in France, not the government.¹²³ However, other countries appreciated and admired the complexity of the French propaganda system. In April 1917, the French press control accepted Americans onto its staff, teaching them the French techniques of propaganda dissemination.¹²⁴ For the most part, however, the French censors achieved their aim of calming public opinion by cutting all disturbing news, while convincing people there was no alternative to the continuation of the war; the ends appear to have justified the means.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, 39.

¹²⁰ Roetter, 41.

¹²¹ Sweeney, 9.

¹²² Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 54.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Collins, “The Development of Censorship in World War One France,” 1.

¹²⁵ Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, 58-63.

Germany's leaders – both civilian and military – agreed that winning the war depended upon civilian unity and the will to fight on. Hence, they saw manipulating public opinion through censorship and propaganda on the home front as paramount to the war cause.¹²⁶ Many have argued that the German lack of success in maintaining home front morale was a contributing factor to them losing the war. Richard Bessel notes that German mobilization during World War I occurred in three distinct but interrelated areas: the military, the economy, and the spirit. Mobilization was most successful in the first, less in the second, and least in the third.¹²⁷ While initial efforts to mobilize the spirit, consisting of public displays of war enthusiasm, were successful, newspapers could not keep up the war zeal as everyday privations – namely food shortages – dominated the lives of those in Germany from 1916 on.¹²⁸

In German-occupied France, other problems handicapped German efforts. When the public's interests diverge from that of the ruling class, and when they have their own independent sources of information, the official line (propagated in the media) may be widely doubted.¹²⁹ In occupied France independent sources of information were infrequently available but the divergence between the public's interests and that of the German occupiers was so great as to mean that the effect of propaganda in the occupied zones was much less than on the French and German home fronts. In all these places, however, the average person did not truly understand what was going on with the war

¹²⁶ Stark, 75.

¹²⁷ Richard Bessel, "Mobilizing German Society for War," in Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds. *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, 438.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 450.

¹²⁹ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (NY: Pantheon Books, 2002), xii.

and, as Pierre Sarddella notes, “without news man would find himself incommensurably diminished.”¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Stephens Mitchell, *A History of the News: From the Drum to the Satellite* (New York: Viking, 1988), 18.

Chapter Four:
The Bulletin de Lille

Acting upon a demand from the German authorities, and always under their control, the Lille municipality published the *Bulletin de Lille* on Sundays and Thursdays for the four years of occupation, beginning November 15, 1914. Although controlled by the Germans, some people in Lille welcomed this usually two paged, double-sided newspaper as the only voice – however distorted – of the city.¹ German authorities closely supervised the editor, Paul Cornille, a fact never hidden from the reading public as every edition carried the subtitle “published under the control of German authorities.” The paper’s content suggests that the occupying Germans did not intend the *Bulletin* to be a forceful propaganda tool like the *Gazette des Ardennes*. Instead, it was an implement of control and exploitation. Often its main purpose appeared simply to inform the city’s populace of the voluminous series of new laws and ordinances enacted by the German authorities, to facilitate the exploitation of materials from the area, and to distribute information about shared concerns, such as public health issues. However, the manner in which the newspaper conveyed this information appeared meant to instill fear in the population, even when appearing innocuous, making the paper a part of a system described by historians as “a true reign of terror.”²

To garner an understanding of the information the paper published and its reception by Lille readers, means examining how the German authorities utilized the

¹ P. Pierrard, *Lille et les Lillois: Essai d'histoire collective contemporaine (de 1815 à nos jours)* (Paris: Bloud and Gay, 1967), 262-72.

² Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau, and Becker, 45.

Bulletin de Lille to inform the population of the rules and regulations of occupation and how they used it as an apparatus to facilitate requisitions and the economic exploitation of the area. It is also important to examine the local affairs not directly under German control that the occupiers allowed published in the paper. While the *Bulletin* may not have been principally an instrument of propaganda like the *Gazette des Ardennes*, German control ensured that some attempts at changing public opinion found a place this paper.

Informing the Population of the Wretchedness of Occupation

Goethe noted of his countrymen, “If there has to be a choice between injustice and disorder, the German prefers injustice.”³ To this end, the Germans in occupied France often resorted to a policy of *Schrecklichkeit*, or frightfulness, as they aimed to scare the civil population into absolute submission with the least possible diversion of German military strength.⁴ The policy of *Schrecklichkeit* manifested itself time and time again in the recurring section of the *Bulletin de Lille* entitled “Acts of German Authority.”⁵ Starting with the first edition of the paper and continuing until the April 12, 1917, issue, “Acts of German Authority” appeared in over eighty-five percent of the issues of the paper, and always in the lead-story position frequently dominating the front page.⁶ This section dictated the tone of the newspaper and overwhelmed any editorial character the paper may have possessed. The first edition noted the German military

³ Tuchman, 317.

⁴ John Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire: Myths and Anti-Myths of War, 1865-1945* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980), 26.

⁵ “Actes de l’authorité allemande.”

⁶ The presence of this column continued at almost the same rate of occurrence after April 12, 1917, but a few missing issues from the archives consulted make it impossible to quantify what percentage of editions in which it was present after this date.

authorities' desire to see published, by the municipality, a newspaper that contained official information such as proclamations, notices, and conferences of commanders, during which the Germans briefed French leaders on new orders.⁷ The first section of the first edition set the tone for the paper. It included a list of hostages to be taken, a demand of a 5,000 francs guarantee against hostile action, a proclamation of forbidden acts - some punishable by death, - and an invitation to the lillois not to force the occupying army to damage even more of their beautiful city and suburbs by being hostile towards German troops, placing the responsibility for destruction on the people. Such a proclamation created a tenor of dread, noting that when the Germans could not identify those guilty of an infraction, they would punish the population as a whole.⁸

Other decrees and ordinances under the heading "Acts of German Authority" established among other policies, requirements for passes for French civilians to travel outside the city-center, specific hours during which each person must be inside their home, and providing board to German soldiers. Other regulations prohibited the flying of balloons or pigeons, selling goods on the street, communicating with those outside the occupied zone with the exception of prisoners of war, or having in one's possession arms, radios, clandestine newspapers, or any other objects the Germans saw as potentially dangerous.⁹ The information was often redundant as the German authorities felt the need to reiterate regulations, making their rule seem all pervading. In the December 19, 1915, December 23, 1915, and June 25, 1916, issues of the newspaper, the German authorities offered, "to refresh" the memories of the occupied people, reiterating practically the

⁷ *Bulletin de Lille*, November 15, 1914. The newspaper staff did not translate the word "commander" into French from German, calling the regular meetings, "Conférences à la Kommandantur."

⁸ *Ibid.*, November 14, 1915.

⁹ *Ibid.*, various issues.

whole litany of their regulations.¹⁰ There was a certain macabre humor to the recapping of laws in December 19, 1915, issue, as the list of offenses punishable by death appeared as a two-part series, to be continued in the next issue. If, as Michael Nolan suggests, the French saw in Germans what they feared most about modernity, namely regimentation and anti-individualism, the heavy-handedness of their emphasis on regulations must have confirmed their collective fright.¹¹

The recurring nature of proclamations, ordinances, and decrees did not mean that readers could safely skip reading them, as the occupying forces sometimes arbitrarily changed the rules and regulations. A quick survey of five proclamations, representative of dozens more, offers evidence of how the German occupiers created fear, either intentionally or unintentionally, by capriciously adjusting regulations and expecting the people to be aware of them because of their publication in the *Bulletin de Lille* and various posters displayed around the city. After having set strict curfews early in the occupation, the German authorities surprisingly demonstrated a more lenient attitude and announced in the Thursday June 3, 1915, issue of the paper that the Germans extended curfew to 10pm for the summer months.¹² This small concession came with a caveat; the new curfew was a privilege, and the occupying authorities would take away if the occupied people abused it. Take it away the occupying forces quickly did, as just nine editions later the lead proclamation declared that from July 1 until July 14 all non-Germans in occupied France must stay inside their homes between the times of 6pm and

¹⁰ Ibid., December 19, 1915, December 23, 1915, and June 25, 1916.

¹¹ Nolan, 6.

¹² *Bulletin de Lille*. June 3, 1915. The *Bulletin de Lille* frequently reiterated to readers that all times reflected German time, which was an hour later than the traditional time zone of northern France. This reminder of German control was a cause of considerable resentment for the people of Lille. McPhail, 46.

5am, with those caught outside risking prison sentences.¹³ To further rub salt in the city's collective wound, the proclamation did allow for restaurants and stores to stay open later than curfew, presumably for the benefit of the German occupiers. Unlike many of the other proclamations, the German authorities explained their actions in this one, noting that they felt forced to take these measures (which also included disallowing any more passes for travel west of the city) because French laborers refused to work in accordance with German military demands. German retribution included not only sentencing the supposed ringleader of this labor resistance to death, but also punishing the whole city. For thirteen issues, no mention of curfews appeared in the newspaper. Then a notice appeared in the August 19, 1915, issue, noting the expiration of the 6pm curfew and setting the new time to 10pm.¹⁴ The status of the curfew between July 14, which the original decree stated as its own expiratory date, and the August 19 announcement of the end of the earlier curfew remained unclear. This curfew remained in place until late autumn when the Germans reset it for the winter months.¹⁵ Surely, such instances of contradictory information in the paper added to the sense of fear as uncertainty surrounded what acts would bring down the wrath of the German authorities.

If creating uncertainty was one of the *Bulletin de Lille*'s methods of invoking fear in the population, it must have provoked especially great apprehension in readers in late September 1915. The September 26, 1915, issue of the paper informed readers that the Germans sentenced to death four people for hiding British pilots and aiding their

¹³ *Bulletin de Lille*, July 4, 1915.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, August 19, 1915.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, October 31, 1915. During the winter months, the Germans required the French population to stay inside their homes from 9pm until 6am.

escape.¹⁶ The next issue included a notice that all passes already given out were no longer valid starting that day and that the Germans planned to issue no new passes.¹⁷ Unlike the last example where the earlier curfew was clearly indicated as retribution for the workers' actions, the German occupiers drew no link between the crime of harboring enemy soldiers and the voiding of passes within the pages of the newspaper. The perhaps intentional ambiguity of the reasoning behind the new pass law must have added to the state of fear. The *Bulletin de Lille* also created uncertainty as it provided information with very short notice or even a few days after the fact. Dozens of illustrations can be found of the paper providing pertinent information a day or two late. For example, on Sunday April 2, 1916, the people of Lille read that all permits to circulate with a harnessed horse expired two days earlier and people had to request a renewal before the Germans issued a new permit.¹⁸ The Sunday October 1, 1916, issue of the paper told people to move their clocks forward an hour on September 30, 1916. The newspaper also reported that starting that very day the curfew reset to 9pm from 11pm.¹⁹ While these proclamations were often posted throughout the city, many an instance of panic must have occurred when people found out they had committed punishable acts because they were not aware of rule changes.

The only level of French government left intact during the occupation was the municipal level, in Lille under the auspices of Mayor Delesalle, elected in 1914 before

¹⁶ Ibid., September 26, 1915. Ben Macintyre's *The Englishman's Daughter: A True Story of Love and Betrayal* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001) explores the risks and stresses placed upon people in occupied France during the First World War who hid British soldiers caught behind enemy lines as the Allies retreated in 1914. He tells the story of one family and the British infantry private they concealed from the Germans.

¹⁷ *Bulletin de Lille*, September 30, 1915.

¹⁸ Ibid., April 2, 1916.

¹⁹ Ibid., October 1, 1916.

the German invasion.²⁰ Richard Cobb notes that the municipalization of civilian authority and the regional polarization that ensued was feasible because municipal loyalties remained stronger in northern France than anywhere else in the country.²¹ However, the role of the mayor could not have been an easy one. The Byzantine position of Mayor Delesalle was evident in the pages of the *Bulletin de Lille*. Often times German regulations were prefaced with the introduction that the Germans informed the mayor of the following request / requirement / change.²² Furthermore, another regular section of the paper, “Notices from City Hall,” demonstrated how the German occupying authorities exploited the mayor. While this section did include information about local affairs not directly related to the German spheres of influence, a great deal of space was dedicated to repeating, if in a kinder, gentler, tone, the demands of the German authorities. For example, the Germans left it to the mayor’s office to announce their decision that any bicycle owners not currently employed needed to report to the German authorities for work.²³ One week later, the notice from the mayor’s office cited municipal code to invoke people to keep the streets clean and safe from black ice, a minor fixation of the occupying authorities.²⁴ German authorities also frequently used the mayor’s voice on the subject of identity cards. The occupying authorities regularly repeated decrees requiring all non-German adults in Lille to carry identity cards, but they left the gentle reminders and instructions on how to obtain the cards to the mayor’s office, which the

²⁰ Cobb, 27.

²¹ Ibid., 28-9.

²² The German occupiers used this frequently implemented device in the notice about new hostage requirement in *Bulletin de Lille*, August 5, 1915.

²³ Ibid., November 28, 1915.

²⁴ Ibid., December 5, 1915. In the December 2, 1915 issue, the German authorities told the municipality that they wanted the roads and sidewalks kept swept, particularly after dogs had fouled the area. The *Kommandantur* warned punishment would be inflicted on the city if it is not quickly taken care of.

Bulletin's staff included in several issues.²⁵ From an administrative standpoint, employing the mayor's office to provide such services must have proven convenient. Beyond this expediency, linking the mayor's office so closely to the occupation within the pages of the *Bulletin de Lille* gave the impression not only that German control was all pervading, but also that at some level the city leaders might to begin to acquiesce to the occupiers' authority. While the concept of collusion with the enemy existed before the Second World War, the term "collaboration" originated in Vichy France. When Marshal Pétain met with Hitler in 1940 at Montoire, he announced he was setting off along the "path of collaboration."²⁶ Historians now apply the concept to similar situations throughout the twentieth century.²⁷ Stanley Hoffmann made the distinction between "involuntary collaboration" and "voluntary collaboration."²⁸ The German occupiers may have wanted to create the appearance of collaboration with the leadership in city hall, and attempted to create such an appearance by forcing it to reiterate many of their demands. However, the people of Lille respected their civic leaders and understood any collaboration that occurred was of the involuntary variety.

From early in the occupation, the German authorities required census reports on the number of horses, dogs, and other domesticated animals owned by those under their control.²⁹ The Sunday November 14, 1915, issue of the *Bulletin* informed people that the census of horses, chickens, mules, and donkeys would occur monthly, and the newspaper

²⁵ Ibid., Examples of such notices are in the February 17, 1916, March 5, 1916, and May 11, 1916 issues.

²⁶ Paul Sanders, *The British Channel Islands under German Occupation, 1940-1945* (London: Biddles Ltd., 2005), 59.

²⁷ Ibid., 60.

²⁸ Ibid., 59.

²⁹ References to horse censuses were particularly frequent and they usually were a prelude to requisition. An example of the explicit rules, which included bringing horses in for inspection, occurred in the *Bulletin de Lille*, Sunday April 11, 1915. Dog censuses transpired both for health purposes and to place a tax on them, as found in the March 16, 1916, issue.

provided people with a detailed chart of when they were supposed to report to the German office responsible, the *Festungs-Fuhrpark*.³⁰ The regulation of people was no less. The top half of the front page of the Thursday September 2, 1915, *Bulletin* announced the undertaking of a general census of the population.³¹ Reinforced by its discussion in the city-hall section of the paper, the census was to be of the whole population except Germans and German allies, and was to include a listing of each person's profession and all their properties.³² When by the end of December not everyone filled-out the necessary paperwork or complied with the decree to post their information on the front doors of their homes, the tone of the Governor's decree became harsher, threatening those who did not meet these terms with a fine of 3,000 marks "or worse."³³ All these serve as examples of how the Germans used the *Bulletin de Lille* on a regular basis to give updates on what information they required from people, making it a useful instrument for keeping close track of the occupied.

Surprisingly, the Germans did not use this newspaper to the extent one would expect in their demands for forced labor. As Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker note in *14-18: Understanding the Great War*, the Germans were quick to conscript men, women, and older children to repair railway lines, roads, and fortifications.³⁴ This was in violation of The Hague Convention's stipulation that nobody be forced to work for the war effort against his own country. Some workers refused to work for the Germans in early July 1915, citing The Hague Conventions. The Germans

³⁰ Ibid., November 14, 1915.

³¹ Ibid., Thursday September 2, 1915.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., Sunday December 26, 1915.

³⁴ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*, trans. By Catherine Temerson (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 59.

replied in the *Bulletin de Lille* that this reading of the Convention was completely wrong, alluding to Article 52, stating that working for the enemy was acceptable as long as the actions were not explicitly against their own country.³⁵ Article 52 states in part that “Neither requisitions in kind nor services can be demanded from communes nor inhabitants, except for the needs of the army of occupation. They shall be in proportion to the resources of the country.”³⁶

This was the first reference found in the paper to the occupiers’ right to require work from the French, and they based their position on logic, rather than fear. An agricultural labor shortage existed in the countryside by 1916, coupled with unemployment in the cities, leading to German attempts to recruit farm workers from the cities. When this failed, the Germans resorted to conscription.³⁷ In May 1916, the Germans transported 25,000 men and women to Germany from the occupied zone, having given these people an hour and a half to pack their belongings, a fact easily overlooked from reading the *Bulletin de Lille*.³⁸ However, by July 2, 1916, the German need for workers had led to harsh work requests in the paper. The lead piece in that day’s paper stated “We demand the following: For people of both sexes to do agricultural work.”³⁹ The pay for men was to be 2.5 francs a day and women were to receive 1.5 francs a day, with room and board included.

³⁵ *Bulletin de Lille*, July 4, 1915.

³⁶ James Wilford Garner, *International Law and the World War*, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), 122. Article 52 also stated that contributions in kind shall, as far as possible, be paid in cash; if not, a receipt shall be given, and payment shall be arranged as soon as possible. The German did not pay cash, and their receipts proved worthless.

³⁷ Darrow, 117.

³⁸ Martin Gilbert, *the First World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1994), 247.

³⁹ *Bulletin de Lille*, July 2, 1916.

Later on that same year the Germans tried a different approach to gain workers. The lead section screamed “Unemployed! You will find permanent work in different fields and services in Lille.”⁴⁰ While references to the need for workers appeared intermittent throughout the publication of the paper, the use of double terminology about volunteers and employment opportunities, sometimes tied to the German occupying forces and sometimes not, makes it difficult to determine which references were related to the harsh system of forced work that characterized much of life in the occupied zone.⁴¹ There were frequent demands for various groups (usually men of a certain age, but also women) to report at a certain time to German authorities, but the *Bulletin de Lille* does not reveal which of these calls led to deportations and which were just random checks or demonstrations of their control. The only indication in the *Bulletin* that the menace of deportations was nearing an end was an announcement from city hall that the mayor received word to that effect and hence the Germans now permitted the changing addresses within Lille (the Germans forbade this during the period of deportations.)⁴² It is bewildering that German authorities did not emphasize the peril of deportations in the *Bulletin de Lille* when it was such a central facet of what Martin Gilbert called the all-pervasive tyranny of occupation.⁴³

Perhaps the most blatant attempt by the Germans to instill fear and obedience in the occupied population through the newspaper came in the form of the regular sub-column to “Acts of German Authority,” entitled “German Military Justice.” This section detailed who the Germans deemed to be in violation of their rules and regulations and the

⁴⁰ Ibid., November 5, 1916.

⁴¹ See Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18: Under the Great War*, 60 for a further discussion of double terminology used by the German occupying forces.

⁴² *Bulletin de Lille*, May 4, 1916.

⁴³ Gilbert, *The First World War*, 247.

punishments for these infractions. For example, on Sunday, August 1, 1915, numerous people received sentences for violating twenty-one different rules, including an eleven year-old girl sentenced to two months in jail for hurling insults at Germans.⁴⁴ Other violations cited that day included inciting hostility towards Germans, drawing plans of the fort without permission, hiding arms and helping to hide arms, carrying illicit correspondence, keeping pigeons, assisting in desertion, hiding French soldiers, and using fake passes.⁴⁵ In this issue of the *Bulletin de Lille*, it appears the aim was to intimidate by the sheer volume of people sentenced, for crimes both large and small. The Thursday, August 17, 1916, edition included another long list of sentences; this list demonstrated that the Germans were not going to turn a blind eye to even smaller offenses, as every punishment was either a fine or jail term of thirty days or less.⁴⁶ In an earlier issue the “German Military Justice” section was much shorter but fear inspiring. It reported that the German occupiers executed Belgian student Léon Trulin that morning at the Citadel, after condemning him for spying.⁴⁷ The Governor, who at that time was General Von Heinrich, signed the section for that day, remarking “take this as a warning.”⁴⁸ Equally bone chilling, was the “German Military Justice” of Thursday, August 31, 1916. Readers discovered that the Dean Jean-Baptiste Leclerq of Saint-Christopher church in neighboring Tourcoing publicly stated to his parishioners that they did not have to comply with German metal requisition demands. As a result, he received ten years solitary confinement, and the Germans had already transported him to Germany to begin

⁴⁴ *Bulletin de Lille*, August 1, 1915.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, The same tone was also set in May 25, 1916.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, August 17, 1916.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, November 11, 1915.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

serving his sentence.⁴⁹ One parishioner remembered Leclerq's first sermon after the German occupation, describing him as a saintly man, a brave man, because he defied the Germans and did not mince his words in doing so.⁵⁰ During his sermon, Leclerq stated that whatever happened, no one must work for the Germans or do anything at all to help them.⁵¹

A feeling of helplessness permeated the article as the Germans already deported Dean Jean-Baptiste Leclerq. The newspaper's report of other major sentences handed down by the Kommandantur several days after their implementation, probably only added to a feeling of helplessness for the French. And certainly the prominence of Leclerq, an only have further reinforced this sentiment.

Announcements of German extractions of French assets began in the paper immediately with war contributions. Such heavy demands reduced the mayor by the fourth issue of the paper to groveling in a published letter to Governor Von Heinrich, stating that the bank was empty, and municipal workers had to knock on every citizen's door twice to raise the first 3 million francs demanded. The mayor explained that he would not be able to pay the next installment, and, after laying out a detailed recitation of what the city had already paid and suffered through, he requested a reduction.⁵² Von Heinrich's response, printed under the mayor's letter, was to give an extension of the deadline but to offer no moderation in terms of amount.⁵³ Publishing the details of this communication in the *Bulletin* made the French representative appear weak and

⁴⁹ Ibid., August 31, 1916.

⁵⁰ Lyn Macdonald, *1915: The Death of Innocence* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 62.

⁵¹ Ibid. Henri Dewavrin, the man remembering Leclerq, stated that the Germans arrested him a few days later, in October 1914. However, other sources confirm that the Germans arrested and deported Leclerq to Germany in 1916. Alain Plateaux and Alain Lottin, *Histoire de Tourcoing* (Dunkerque: Westhoek, 1986), 347.

⁵² *Bulletin de Lille*, November 26, 1914.

⁵³ Ibid.

ineffectual in the face of German might, seemingly creating an image symbolic of the entire occupation relationship. This image was repeated in subsequent issues, as the mayor pleaded to his constituents to exchange bank notes for communal vouchers as he tried to raise money to meet successive war contribution deadlines. These appeals continued for several months, slowly waning as the supply of hard currency diminished in the occupied zone and communal vouchers became the norm. However, German demands for materials never abated.

The Thursday, October 26, 1916, issue of the *Bulletin de Lille* contained a lengthy, severely worded list of objects subject to requisition for the war. This list included cars, motorcycles, bikes, and all accessories for these vehicles including rubber in all forms and quantities. The Germans demanded oil and fat from those who had more than ten kilograms in stock. Wool, cotton, hemp, and other fiber materials; wick and thread; leather and tanned materials, electrical wire and cord; objects with industrial uses, such as copper, nickel, pewter, and brass, and all platinum that was not being used for medical purposes also made the long list.⁵⁴ The German authorities were not demanding people relinquish these items immediately. Rather, they were subject to requisitioning. This meant citizens in possession of such goods had to submit a list of them to section commanders. Individuals submitting such inventories became responsible for security of the goods and hence, they could not sell them or, if non-durable, use them, under penalty of five years in prison.⁵⁵ The newspaper piece gave enough information to ensure the populace's compliance with German wants, but its wording also left enough unstated to create anxiety and doubt. Which of these items would be requisitioned and if so when

⁵⁴ Ibid., October 26, 1916.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

and how? By requiring a list, the German authorities left the citizens of Lille in a state of insecurity, unsure of what the occupiers would do with this information. The Germans frequently used this tactic in the *Bulletin*. While some requisitions printed in the paper were straightforward, such as the order requiring that all timber be turned into authorities within four days⁵⁶, or all telephones and related pieces need to be given in immediately⁵⁷, many required only a written list being handed in, leaving the actual loss of goods to a later date. The paper warned car and harness owners that if they did not give a detailed inventory of their possessions, the Germans would confiscate them and their owners would be sent to prison.⁵⁸ Photography equipment and alcohol were two categories of goods that received similar treatment in subsequent issues.⁵⁹ The follow-through on many of these requisitions occurred in person in the form of door-to-door seizures and never made the pages of the *Bulletin*. To read the paper without knowledge of these other German actions would not reveal the entirety of the system of appropriation that led Helen McPhail to observe, “One of the most dreaded words throughout the war in the north was requisition.”⁶⁰ A *New York Times*’ journalist wrote after the war, “Their system of exactions and requisitions was well calculated to break the spirit as well as the purse of the great, ancient, and rich city.”⁶¹

It is interesting to note that one element that did not play a key role in the *Bulletin de Lille* was the listing of German-held French prisoners of war. As Charles Roetter

⁵⁶ Ibid., December 6, 1914.

⁵⁷ Ibid., October 10, 1915.

⁵⁸ Ibid., July 25, 1915. Confiscation and requisitioning differed; as with most requisitions the German authorities provided a voucher for the goods, which in theory could be turned in when the war was over for reimbursement. Confiscation of goods did not carry with it the pretext of reimbursement.

⁵⁹ Ibid., October 24, 1915 and April 13, 1916.

⁶⁰ McPhail, 91.

⁶¹ “Wanton Destruction of French Factories: Details of Germany’s Systematic Crippling of Rival Industries in the Invaded Territory,” *The New York Times Current History: The European War*, Vol. 18. (New York: New York Times, 1918), 509.

notes, the Germans ensured that the French read the *Gazette des Ardennes* by publishing lists of captured French soldiers in that newspaper, as “no French family with men folk serving in their country’s army could be expected to resist such bait.”⁶² The *Bulletin de Lille* did not utilize this same maneuver to ensure readers. Only between January 17, 1915, and March 21, 1915, did any issues contain prisoners of war lists.⁶³ From that point until 1917, the only reference to prisoners held in Germany was a notice dictating the rules for sending a monthly postcard or care package to them. Perhaps the Germans recognized that the *Bulletin de Lille* would be read without this enticement, as it was technically published by the municipality, and contained other items of interest, such as birth and death notices as well as information about food supplies, the limited local events still available, and even an advice column.

Outside the German Purview: Other Themes in the Bulletin de Lille

The municipality published the *Bulletin de Lille*, albeit under heavy German direction, and the Germans allowed space in the paper for local affairs they deemed necessary or innocuous. These portions of the paper gave the *Bulletin* any of the creditability it carried with the people of Lille, and almost all of such information was local in nature. The small amount of news from beyond the occupied area published in the *Bulletin* appears to have been hand-selected by the Germans with a purpose, and the *Bulletin de Lille* provided only rare, and extremely controlled glimpses into the outside world. An early issue of the paper reported that the bells were sounding in Lille again because Germans troops had won a great victory against the principle section of the

⁶² Roetter, 72.

⁶³ *Bulletin de Lille*, January 17, 1915; January 21, 1915; February 7, 1915; February 11, 1915; March 7, 1915; March 11, 1915; March 14 1915, and March 21, 1915.

Russian army that was now in retreat.⁶⁴ The closest event that could have caused this bell ringing was the Russian evacuation of Lodz; the Russians retreated thirty miles to a line along the Rawka and Bzura Rivers, where they created sand trenches.⁶⁵ This piece appeared under the heading of “German Authorities’ Communiqués,” that is, as an official announcement probably designed to demoralize the French. The editorial staff did not again so blatantly attempt to sap morale. Instead, it used international news in a more subtle way. These international articles more typically took the form of reprinting pieces in the general body of the paper (as opposed to under “Acts of German Authority”) from other newspapers, giving the appearance that German censors allowed outside voices. However, the newspapers most often quoted were the *Gazette de Cologne* and *Bien Public*, two newspapers published by the German authorities in other areas. Reprints usually appeared within ten days or so of the original publication. For example, the April 22, 1915, issue carried a reprint from the April 16 *Gazette de Cologne*, stating that the French government under President Viviani had agreed to accept bank notes issued by the occupation authorities at face value.⁶⁶ This story suited the Germans’ needs, as they began to encourage the elderly and sick to move to unoccupied France. A second example, in the February 18, 1915, issue of the *Bulletin de Lille*, carried a reprint from the *Bien Public*, telling how bakers in Germany dealt calmly with the white bread shortage by making “KK” bread, made with a high percentage of potato wheat, barley, oats, and rice, which the German people accepted.⁶⁷ This story was blatant propaganda. Within months of this story, wretchedness gripped the people of

⁶⁴ Ibid., December 20, 1914.

⁶⁵ Burg and Purcell, 37.

⁶⁶ *Bulletin de Lille*, April 22, 1915.

⁶⁷ Ibid., February 18, 1915.

Germany because of a lack of traditional bread. German scientists were so desperate as they attempted to develop a wheat substitute that they considered not only straw, rushes, Icelandic moss, and animal blood (as an ersatz) but attempted to chemically treat sawdust and wood pulp to convert cellulose into a digestible carbohydrate.⁶⁸ A dietary respite for the German home front diet only came with the conquest of Rumania and its stores of wheat.⁶⁹

The above two instances were clearly included in the *Bulletin* to support German endeavors, but another piece reprinted from the *Bien Public* was even more obvious in its intent. An article in that newspaper included comments reprinted from a speech given in the Common Council of Antwerp, where a member stated that for a people who had been extremely free, occupation is a heavy sacrifice and a real test, but that one worsens his difficulties if he works against the occupying authorities.⁷⁰

The *Bulletin de Lille* also included the occasional article originally from non-German controlled papers. A story acquired from a Dutch journal told of the high-cost of provisions in Holland, showing how neutral countries also suffered from high prices thanks to the war, with the implication being the Germans did not cause all hardships.⁷¹ Sporadic and rare pieces of international news seemed to carry no message at all, such as the listing of Noble Prize winners.⁷² However, these pieces were atypical, with the majority of the paper dedicated to local affairs.

⁶⁸ H.E. Jacob and Peter Reinhart, *Six Thousand Years of Bread: Its Holy and Unholy History* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2007), 310.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁷⁰ *Bulletin de Lille*, March 14, 1915.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, July 6, 1916.

⁷² *Ibid.*, May 4, 1916; May 7, 1916, and May 11, 1916.

The *Bulletin de Lille* was a convenient source of local information. Readers could remain up to date about when and where French military allocation distribution occurred, and when charitable organizations provided services.⁷³ Information regarding French military allocations was particularly important to the people of occupied France, as many people relied upon this resource and there was frequent confusion about who was eligible for the payments. On August 5, 1914, the French legislature created military allowances to provide for the dependents of mobilized soldiers in financial need.⁷⁴ The law authorized the payment of 1.25 francs per day to needy adult dependants (wives and elderly parents) and a 0.5 franc supplement for each dependent child under the age of sixteen.⁷⁵ The system was difficult for local officials to administer, even in unoccupied France, as civil servants attempted to keep down costs, turning away women in dire need of the money. The distribution of benefits gradually liberalized, until it reached most military wives and families, and was even expanded to non-martial “companions” and illegitimate children.⁷⁶ Beyond military allowances, readers could also remain informed about what schools functioned at the primary levels and higher, and which programs still accepted people at the Université de Lille.⁷⁷ Vaccine availability information became particularly important as the city faced an outbreak of typhoid fever in the winter of 1915-1916.

The back half of the paper always carried birth and death announcements, as well as a classified section with job announcements (and much more frequently people

⁷³ Ibid. Information about military allocations appeared on roughly a monthly basis after December 9, 1915.

⁷⁴ Darrow, 172.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ For example, in the November 18, 1915 issue, people read of where and when the colleges of medicine and pharmacy held their preparatory exams. In the July 23, 1916, issue the newspaper published the results of the final musical competition at the Conservatoire de Lille.

looking for work) and a great deal of advertisements. The ads provide interesting insight into life in occupied Lille. People often placed ads selling personal goods as they tried to remain solvent.⁷⁸ Several ads concentrated on hard-to-get items, such as coffee, cigarettes, and home-brewing systems, emphasizing the quantities available.⁷⁹ Advertisements generated by wartime conditions ran alongside signs of continued normalcy, such as ads for shampoos promising beautiful hair and the ever-present ad for pianos.⁸⁰ A multitude of ads promoted various foods, highlighting the sporadic times when certain foods became available.

As Helen McPhail notes in her study, “the way in which northern France was fed during the occupation is an extraordinary one, involving complicated international politics.”⁸¹ Considering the tremendous control the Germans wielded in the occupied zone, it may be surprising to note that they allowed the Americano-Hispanic Commission (known as the Committee for the Relief of Belgium after American entry into the war) and its related organization, the Comité d’Alimentation de Nord de la France (C.A.N.F.) to exist within occupied territories. Yet, this was help that German authorities gladly accepted, as it both avoided depletion of their own resources and demonstrated benevolence to the outside world.⁸² From May 6, 1915, when the C.A.N.F. began to sell foodstuffs in Lille, it had a regular presence in the *Bulletin*. Notice of what items were for sale, their price, locations of distribution, and quantities allowed per family were

⁷⁸ Representative issues include May 17, 1915; May 28, 1916; July 13, 1916; December 3, 1916 and February 4, 1917.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, September 10, 1916.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, August 3, 1916.

⁸¹ McPhail, 61.

⁸² Hull, 230 and Stephen Pope and Elizabeth Anne Wheel, *The Dictionary of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 115.

regular fare in the paper.⁸³ Bread was the central foodstuff the C.A.N.F. focused upon. Other frequently listed items included dried milk, soap, and produce such as kidney beans, rice, coffee, and cereal. Despite their best efforts, the Americano-Hispanic Commission and the C.A.N.F. were the first to admit that the food supply had less variety than before the war, and people had to be more ingenious in using what they had.⁸⁴ The C.A.N.F. offered cooking courses to help in this plight and published in the *Bulletin* recipes meant to guide people on how to use lesser-known foods and how to simulate common goods lacking in the market. For example, olive oil was absent due to impediments facing Italian imports and German requisitions. Thus the April 16, 1916, issue included an article explaining how to turn sunflower seeds into oil, while a December 5, 1915, article offered ideas on how to use tomato oil in cooking instead, and the October 14, 1915, issue explained how a combination of lard and water could replace the missing olive oil.⁸⁵ As meat quickly became scarce, the newspaper lauded the benefits of vegetarianism, and recipes based more upon vegetables played a starring role.⁸⁶ The newspaper dedicated a great deal of space to trying to change the sensibilities and tastes of the people of Lille. Several issues of the *Bulletin* tried to convince readers that rice was not “only for people of the yellow race.”⁸⁷ The Lilliois read that in America, India, and Italy rice, rather than bread, formed the basis of people’s diet and they should utilize it to their advantage in the face of occupied France’s bread shortage.⁸⁸ The superiority of rice was also extolled in another issue that noted it had more albumin

⁸³ For illustrative examples, see the *Bulletin de Lille*, May 6, 1915; July 11, 1915, and March 26, 1916.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, August 12, 1915.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, April 16, 1916; December 5, 1915 and October 14, 1915.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Vegetarian recipes were prevalent through the newspaper (August 12, 1915), and the March 23, 1916 issue included “Suggestion of Vegetarianism.”

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, February 7, 1915.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

and starch than both bread and potatoes and hence was a superior food source.⁸⁹ The same issue ran an article entitled “Bread through the Ages,” which placed in context the current bread shortage in French history by making comparisons dating back to the reign of Charles VIII.⁹⁰ Other issues introduced people to the tea flower, offered an extensive look at the history of the fig, a two-part series on currant drinks, and a detailed discussion about various cheeses that included a poem.⁹¹

When the Lilliois needed advice beyond what to make for dinner they could write into the *Bulletin* and perhaps see their questions answered in the “Little Correspondences” column of the paper. Appearing in approximately fifteen percent of the issues published between March 25, 1915, and April 12, 1917, this featured article provided legal and moral guidance to readers. Disputes between renters and landlords filled many of the articles, as the paper suggested tempering the letter of the law with an understanding that everybody was going through hardships during this time and allowances had to be made for late payments.⁹² As in the case with rental disputes, the feature often acted as a source for minor legal advice about issues the German occupiers carried nothing about. A “disappointed mother” received the information that under French civil code she could do nothing to stop her twenty-seven year old son from marrying a woman of whom she did not approve.⁹³ Usually the section avoided all mention of German occupation and in the only three exceptions, the newspaper staff’s response supported German laws. In the August 17, 1916, issue the counsel provided to

⁸⁹ Ibid., March 4, 1915. The June 4, 1916 issue included a lengthy article about rice production around the world.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., October 3, 1915; June 15, 1916; July 23, 1916; August 3, 1916 and May 18, 1916.

⁹² Ibid., August 19, 1915; August 29, 1915; February 10, 1916; July 2, 1916; August 10, 1916; August 31, 1916 and September 28, 1916.

⁹³ Ibid., August 3, 1916.

one man told him that of course he could not fly a kite in public, and the article sarcastically reminded him that German authorities forbid all visual signals, which obviously included kites.⁹⁴ The newspaper reminded another reader that she could not beat her carpets outside, and told a third person that he could not write to his parents in Cambrai or Saint-Quentin because that would violate the German rules against the exchange of letters between communes.⁹⁵ The column offered guidance on using social services provided by the municipal government. The newspaper staff chastised an anonymous reader for claiming multiple military benefits for different family members.⁹⁶ Another article explained in detail how the French government regulated military allocations and who had the right to claim them, noting the money was not a reimbursable charity. The topic of who was eligible for what benefits was also addressed when the paper informed a reader that welfare benefits were fundamentally local, and that payments to families of evacuees for their absent relatives were not authorized.⁹⁷

Another recurring feature was “Stories of Integrity,” although it was not as frequent as the advice column. A typical anecdote appeared on April 20, 1916. In this issue, the paper told of an unnamed man who found a five-franc note, and deposited it in the bank until its owner claimed it.⁹⁸ The implication of this column was obvious. In a time and place where almost everyone was having financial difficulties, and rationing fraud, and black marketeering was plaguing international relief efforts, people were encouraged to follow examples of honesty. This may not have been an understated

⁹⁴ Ibid., August 17, 1916.

⁹⁵ Ibid., March 1, 1917.

⁹⁶ Ibid., August 12, 1915.

⁹⁷ Ibid., December 28, 1916.

⁹⁸ Ibid., April 20, 1916.

maneuver, but rarely could any newspaper under German control be accused of subtleness.

Attempts at Propaganda in the Bulletin

Jürgen Wilke asserts in his study of propaganda use during the First World War that a lack of understanding of psychological warfare hindered German propaganda efforts.⁹⁹ In the *Bulletin de Lille*, the German authorities for the most part kept their propaganda strategy simple – overwhelm the people of Lille with their omnipresence and scare them into submission. Yet, even in following this simple plan, the German occupiers made a few missteps over the course of publication.

The cardinal rule of propaganda is never to answer enemy charges, as this only reinforces the original assertion.¹⁰⁰ Alice Marquis claims that the Germans violated this rule throughout the war, and hence defensiveness verging on self-pity was to be the dominant tone in Germany's propaganda effort.¹⁰¹ This breach of propaganda theory can be seen in several instances in the *Bulletin de Lille*. As we have seen, early on in the occupation some workers refused to toil for the Germans, citing the Hague Convention. While the Germans replied with a harsh sentence for their ringleader and punishment the whole town, they also argued the merits of their side by referencing the Hague Convention, going as far as citing specific articles. Not only was this action hypocritical as German military authorities held these international laws in low regard, but it also

⁹⁹ Jürgen Wilke, "German Foreign Propaganda during World War I: The Central Office of Foreign Services," *Propaganda in the Twentieth Century*, Jürgen Wilke, ed. (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press Inc, 1998), 20.

¹⁰⁰ Marquis, 488.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

gave a public platform to the original charges that they were violating the rules of war.¹⁰²

An even worse blunder of this nature was an article in the December 13, 1914, issue of the *Bulletin*, entitled “Protection of Art Work.” Reprinted from the December 3 issue of the *Gazette de Cologne*, it refuted allegations that the Germans had seized an altar from a Belgian church and it was now in Berlin. The article claimed German authorities respected the Hague Convention in regard to its prohibitions against the removal of artwork from museums or churches in occupied zones.¹⁰³ This defensive tone mirrored domestic German coverage. To excuse the destruction of the library at Louvain, *Kunstchronik*, an internationally-read German art journal wrote, “Implicit confidence may be placed in our Army Command, which will never forget its duty to civilization even in the heat of battle. Yet, even these duties have limit. All possible sacrifices must be made for the preservation of precious legacies of the past. But where the whole is at stake, their protection cannot be guaranteed.”¹⁰⁴ The world had a justified fear that despite the preservationist dialogue, that the Germans were willing to destroy artwork and monuments if they stood to gain strategically, or appropriate artworks and take them back to Germany.¹⁰⁵

On rare occasions, too much information lessened the intimidation factor of the “Acts of German Authority.” In one of the earlier demands for people to present

¹⁰² For a detailed explanation of German military opinions about the Hague Convention, see Hull, 119-125.

¹⁰³ *Bulletin de Lille*, December 13, 1914. Article 27 of the 1907 Hague Convention declares, “In sieges and bombardments all available precautions must be adopted to spare buildings devoted to divine worships, art, education, or social welfare, also historical monuments, hospitals, and assembly points for the wounded and sick, provided that they are not being used at the same time for military purposes. It is the duty of the besieged to mark these buildings and assembly points with easily visible marks, which must be made known beforehand to the besieging army.” M. Cherif Bassious, “International Criminal Law, Vol. 1, Sources, Subjects, and Contents (Leiden, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2008), 980.

¹⁰⁴ Noah Charney, *Stealing the Mystic Lamb: The True Story of the World’s Most Coveted Masterpiece* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010), 122.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

themselves for registration, German authorities explained that the aim was to gain a general idea of the population size and composition of Lille.¹⁰⁶ Since this was an isolated incidence of German explanation, it appears to be a gaffe rather than an indication of trying to build a relationship on anything but fear with the people in the occupied zone. Such a slip also occurred in their use of the mayor's office as a conduit. Making the mayor beg for money in the pages of the *Bulletin* instilled an image of French weakness. However, when the mayor was allowed to somewhat complain about German demands, it emphasized their unjustness rather than French weakness. Such was the case in the March 7, 1915 issue of the *Bulletin*, when the article entitled "Appeal for Funds" noted that outside the considerable amounts paid to supply the troops, the German authorities now demanded a contribution of a million more francs to support the civilian German government in Lille.¹⁰⁷ The mayor as the French representative sounded more exasperated with than fearful of German rule.

The *Bulletin de Lille* failed at times as a tool of German propaganda because, as stated earlier, it gave too much information. Such was the case in the March 30, 1916, issue when an article entitled "The Health of Lille," informed readers that for the week of March 12-18 the city registered 145 deaths, while for the same week a year earlier there were only 72.¹⁰⁸ Certainly the people of Lille did not need the newspaper to know the death rate was rising, and diseases directly or indirectly related to a lack of food (such as tuberculosis, dysentery, and scurvy) were claiming more and more lives.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, it was a propaganda faux pas to allow the paper's publishers to include a reference

¹⁰⁶ *Bulletin de Lille*, January 3, 1915.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, March 7, 1915.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, March 30, 1916.

¹⁰⁹ Folks, 127.

pointing out the obvious. The occupiers directly made the same mistake again when under “Acts of German Authority” they included the results of their last population census, which included a decrease of almost 8,000 people in one year.¹¹⁰ The many occurrences of the Germans utilizing their tool of control effectively by simply following their simple tactic of invoking feelings of fear overshadowed these German propaganda missteps.

In 1979, Alfred Cornebise published a study of *Nachrichtendienst*, a German-language paper produced by the French in the Ruhr valley when they occupied it in 1923.¹¹¹ The French were trying to control all aspects of the life of the civilian population while the Germans were responding with passive resistance, strikes, and sabotage. The French gave considerable attention to propaganda and control of information, curtailing all other media in the area and using their newspaper as an organ of French indoctrination and cultural propaganda.¹¹² The study identified several themes in the propaganda of the *Nachrichtendienst*, of which the most fundamental – forcing the occupied people to recognize that resistance was futile- can also be seen in the *Bulletin de Lille*.¹¹³ The Ruhr paper named the Germans arrested and elaborated upon their deeds. The impression sought was that the occupation forces were inexorable.¹¹⁴ The same strategy played out the “German Military Justice” section in almost every issue of the *Bulletin*.

¹¹⁰ *Bulletin de Lille*, January 28, 1917.

¹¹¹ Alfred Cornebise, “The Refinement of Allied Press Propaganda: The Case Study of the *Nachrichtendienst*,” *German Studies Review* 2 (February 1979): 30-48.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

A clever use of propaganda found in the *Bulletin de Lille* attempted to imply that the Germans were not the sole cause of misery in occupied France. As Hew Strachan notes in his survey of the First World War, many of the indignities suffered in the occupied zone were little different from those suffered as the result of wartime necessities in the rest of France, but inhabitants of the occupied zone did not know that.¹¹⁵ The paper informed Lille's readers that hardships were being felt elsewhere, in stories about the high cost of provisions in Holland, and through analysis that stated that while common goods might have been expensive, prices still were not as bad as those in Paris in 1870.¹¹⁶ By placing the current misery associated with the occupation in both an international and historical context, the German occupying authorities appeared to attempt to ease their culpability in the suffering of the people without lessening their appearance of domination. If, as Richard Cobb asserts, the Germans at times believed Lille would eventually be included within the Reich or would become part of a satellite state, this was a good way to start prepping the populace for a less-abrasive relationship.¹¹⁷

A key focus of wartime propaganda was to drive a wedge between the allied nations. The *Bulletin de Lille* did make sly attempts to dampen the anglophile tendencies other historians have found as prevalent in northern France.¹¹⁸ The Germans employed British aerial bombings to attempt an "us against them" attitude in the *Bulletin*. The "Acts of German Authority" in the January 20, 1916, took on a much friendlier tone than usual. An open letter to the people of Lille stated that a recent English aerial bombing,

¹¹⁵ Strachan, 58.

¹¹⁶ *Bulletin de Lille*, July 6, 1916 and September 7, 1916.

¹¹⁷ Cobb, *French and Germans*, 26.

¹¹⁸ Becker, "D'une guerre à l'autre", 457.

done without aiming at targets of military importance, had caused considerable damage. Hence, German authorities counseled the civilian population to seek shelter from bombing raids in caves and to avoid fire by removing flammable materials from areas affected by incendiary debris.¹¹⁹ The April 23, 1916, “Acts of German Authority” attempted to lay blame for forced work deportations on the British, blaming their blockade for the lack of required supplies getting through, which forced the German authorities to deport workers in an attempt to alleviate the misery.¹²⁰ Attempts at demonizing the British were present to an even greater degree in other newspapers received in the occupied zone, most notably the *Gazette des Ardennes*.

Studies of the press demonstrate that newspapers have had more effect reinforcing existing opinions rather than changing them, and that while minor changes in attitude have occasionally followed from reading papers, conversions are rare.¹²¹ Considering the hatred the German occupying forces were understandably facing in Lille, the *Bulletin de Lille* was not aiming for small conversions, nor did it have any chance of winning over people to the occupier’s viewpoint. However, as an apparatus of control, the *Bulletin* could, over time, hope to create a feeling of helplessness and fear amongst the people of Lille, as in issue after issue it related Germans’ omnipresence and complete hegemony over their lives, to convey the futility of resisting their control of the occupied zone. The paper represented as a relatively easy device to give orders to the population and hence facilitated the occupying forces’ ability to place demands on the whole city at once, whether they were to report for deportation or to step off the sidewalk and tip one’s hat in

¹¹⁹ *Bulletin de Lille*, January 20, 1916.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, April 23, 1916.

¹²¹ Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848-1945: Volume Two – Intellect, Taste, and Anxiety* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 570.

deference to officers (a requirement known as *Grusserlass*). Beyond that, the *Bulletin de Lille* was a significant tool that emphasized the absolute control the Germans had, making it a powerful means of undermining French morale.

Chapter Five:

The Bulletin de Roubaix

The German authorities deemed Roubaix in need of its own bi-weekly paper despite the city's proximity to Lille. Situated fifteen kilometers northeast of Lille and close to the Belgian border, we have seen that Roubaix became an urban center during the nineteenth century, with the suburbs of Wattrelos, Lys, Croix, Wasquehal, and Mouvaux surrounding it. The city experienced great prosperity and growth during the industrial revolution, led by its success in the wool industry. Its population of largely working class people reached approximately 120,000 by the eve of the First World War.¹ It would have been simple for the German occupiers to include Roubaix-relevant news in the *Bulletin de Lille* and publish only one paper for the Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing tri-city area. Indeed, for the first few years of the occupation the *Bulletin de Lille* was the only authorized locally published newspaper. However, German occupation plans included the municipalization of the French conquered area, and hence treated each town as a sovereign space, subject only to German control and demands.² Hence, the *Bulletin de Roubaix* published its first issue on Wednesday, December 20, 1916. It published without interruption for almost two years, with the last issue under German control appearing on Wednesday, October 16, 1918.

The *Bulletin de Roubaix* usually consisted of one double-sided sheet. Sixteen times during its two-year run, the paper's editors expanded it to two double-sided pages. Published on Wednesdays and Saturdays, it sold for 0.05 francs an issue, or 1.25 francs for a three-month subscription or 2.35 francs for a six-month subscription

¹ *Lille Before and During the War*, 59.

² Cobb, *French and Germans, Germans and French*, 28.

until May 1, 1918, when the price doubled, with the editors blaming the cost of paper for the increase.

By the start of the war, most newspapers were commercial commodities, and their worth stemmed not only on their capacity to report news accurately, but also to attract advertising due to the size and makeup of their readership. This was not true for the *Bulletin de Roubaix* or the *Bulletin de Lille*. The occupying German authorities demanded the creation of these newspapers to control the information the occupied people received; turning a profit was not the businesses' *raison d'être*. Researching this dissertation revealed no evidence pertaining to how successful this newspaper was at covering its own costs, or whether the German occupiers ever invested money into the endeavor. The newspaper staff was French, with Antoine Neumans being the editor-printer of record, but the German occupiers conceived the paper and the staff knew German censors would review their work. It is almost certainly received requisitioned printing presses and paper to begin its publication.

The newspaper's offices moved twice during this time period, first in April 1917 to give the publishers more space, and again in February 1918 when management of the paper changed after its original manager, Madame Reboux, was discovered aiding the clandestine press.³ After altering its typeface in the January 3, 1917, issue, the look of the paper remained the same, although the paper shortage did cause printers to use yellow or pink colored paper on rare occasions.⁴ The paper shortage greatly affected the paper; on five separate occasions early in its publication,

³ *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*, April 7, 1917 and February 16, 1918. Three issues of the newspaper never made it to print –the February 13, 1918 issue due to the change in management and two issues towards the very end of the war in October 1918. See the chapter on the clandestine press for Madame Rouboux's role in printing the secret newspapers.

⁴ *Ibid.*, August 25, 1917; September 12, 1917; September 15, 1917 and October 6, 1917.

a message from the editor appeared, noting that there existed more news to report but that space did not allow it.⁵ The *Bulletin de Roubaix* was sold both at newsstands and was available for home delivery in Roubaix, Lille, and Tourcoing, although the paper had to remind its readers that it could not guarantee a delivery time beyond that it would be received the day of publication.⁶ The newspaper even had an auxiliary office in Lille with a staff to accept advertisements and notices. This connection became more tenuous after October 25, 1917, when German authorities forbade traveling between Lille and Roubaix-Tourcoing without their special permission.⁷

The *Bulletin de Roubaix*'s circulation exceeded the 12,000 copies per issue mark by the first anniversary of the paper.⁸ It was still available in all three cities, although the newspaper devoted less and less space to advertisements and news originating in Lille until they all but disappeared. The publishers claimed that they were proud of their paper, "which had rapidly gained credence in public opinion, thanks to providing interesting and varied information that was useful in real life."⁹ The administrators of the paper had the limited aim of informing the populace of German orders, city services, food committee aid, and some news that would be of daily interest.¹⁰ Unlike the *Bulletin de Lille*, which had a menacing tone, the *Bulletin de Roubaix* appears to have truly been a vehicle the German authorities utilized to disseminate information, without the added aim of continuously instilling terror and hopelessness in the occupied people. The newspaper included recurring sections,

⁵ Ibid., January 10, 1917; January 13, 1917; January 24, 1917; March 14, 1917 and April 28, 1917.

⁶ Ibid., January 3, 1917 and February 10, 1917.

⁷ Ibid., October 24, 1917.

⁸ Ibid., December 19, 1917.

⁹ "...rapidement accrédité dans l'opinion publique, grace à son information intéressante et variée des choses utiles de la vie actuelle..." Ibid., December 19, 1917.

¹⁰ Ibid., December 20, 1916.

much like today's papers. "Acts of German Authority," appeared in 131 out of the 191 issues published, and, when present, this article was always in the lead position. The "Notices from City Halls" section was in every issue but one.¹¹ Theatre reviews and a sports section appeared frequently. The newspaper commonly reported upon civil court proceedings, which fell under various headings. Other sections included an advice column and a review of "Act of Decency,"¹² which applauded a local person who returned lost items of value to their owners without demanding compensation. Some stories and news pieces stood alone and did not fall into any of these categories. Advertisements, along with birth and death announcements dominated the backside of the paper. To best examine the news available to people in the occupied zone through the *Bulletin de Roubaix*, this chapter will examine these regular sections.

"Acts of German Authority" to Frivolity:

From Orders to Attempts at Distraction

The "Acts of German Authority" column appeared in sixty-nine percent of the *Bulletin de Roubaix* issues as compared to approximately eighty-five percent of the *Bulletin de Lille* issues. In both papers, prohibitory decrees and German orders, including requisition demands and census roll calls primarily made up most of this section. The notices announcing required census roll calls were frequent, requiring either the whole population to present themselves, or more frequently, men born between 1867-1900. On some occasions, the Germans required men over the age of sixteen not only to present themselves, but also to present evidence of their

¹¹ Ibid., August 14, 1918.

¹² "Acte de Probité." Probité translates to either decency or honesty.

profession, suggesting those not currently employed would be forced to work for the Germans.¹³ Another census notice required the population to state where they lived and note any empty houses around them, warning of up to a three-year prison term if they did not comply.¹⁴ The line between census taking and requisition preparation blurred when requests included listing every animal owned by the people of Roubaix.¹⁵ Both newspapers at times printed such commands and notices after their start dates, albeit less frequently in the *Bulletin de Roubaix*. This happened eight times in the Roubaix paper, including on September 19, 1917, when an earlier curfew hour could have made the prior edition.¹⁶ As the Germans placed notices throughout the city, it is uncertain if these publication dates affected that many people, and whether the late notification was a conscious decision or an error made by a newspaper staff working under the strain of occupation.

The tone of the demands sometimes differed in the two newspapers, with “Acts of German Authority” in the *Bulletin de Roubaix* tending to sound less terrorizing. At times, the difference between the two papers reflected a difference in the circumstances of the cities. Thanks to the German-imposed isolation of the cities, Roubaix did not suffer the typhoid outbreak that afflicted Lille; hence, strict sanitation decrees were not as necessary in Roubaix. For the most part, however, both cities endured equal torments of forced labor, food shortages, requisitioning, and the fear of fines or imprisonment for even minor infractions. The difference in the papers was not a reflection of the difference of life in the cities, but a variation in the

¹³ *Bulletin de Roubaix*, February 17, 1917.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, June 23, 1917.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, May 5, 1917.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, September 1917; December 27, 1916; April 4, 1917; June 9, 1917; June 23, 1917; March 16, 1918; April 17, 1918 and May 25, 1918.

communication of information. J.P. Whitaker experienced German control of Roubaix until he escaped in January 1916. He wrote of the harshness of German rule in Roubaix, noting that before March 1915, the German governors treated the people of Roubaix with tolerable leniency, but at this time began “to initiate a regime of stringent regulation and repression,” perhaps as a response to the British attack on Neuve Chapelle.¹⁷

That is not to contend that “Acts of German Authority” in the *Bulletin de Roubaix* read as polite pleas to follow the rules. Most articles sinisterly prognosticated the fines and punishments the Germans would bestow upon those who did not follow their often-arbitrary rules. The German writers of the “Acts of German Authority” ruthlessly told readers the German occupiers would shoot them without any hesitation if they attempted to communicate with prisoners of war being herded through their towns and cities.¹⁸ Despite the regular reports of people sentenced for crimes - including those punished by execution - there were no reports in the *Bulletin de Roubaix* of the Germans shooting any French citizens for talking with prisoners of war taken through the city. One prisoner of war reported that as German soldiers (specifically Uhlans, German cavalry) moved him through the city, they “employed their lances for beating off Belgian or French women who tried to give [them] food.”¹⁹

¹⁷ J.P. Whitaker, “Under German Rule in France and Belgium: A Young Englishman’s Experience,” *The New York Times Current History: The European War, April-June 1917* (New York: New York Times, 1917), 525.

¹⁸ *Bulletin de Roubaix*, July 20, 1918; July 27, 1918 and September 4, 1918.

¹⁹ Government Committee on Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War. *Report on the Transport of British prisoners of war to Germany*. London: H.M. Stationery, 1918.

Despite the frequent harsh tone, a benevolent quality often crept into the section when compared to its *Bulletin de Lille* counterpart. For example, a request for workers early in the paper's publication lauded the rewards of the jobs, rather than threatening reprisals if French men and women did not come forward to fill the positions. Potential employees read that employment as masons, locksmiths, and carpenters paid well and that they could continue to live at home while working.²⁰ Those evacuating to unoccupied France learned what they were allowed to take with them, rather than having to read what they were forbidden to carry.²¹ Rather than telling people all outdoor lights were forbidden and that indoor lights had to have been invisible in the street, as the *Bulletin de Lille* did early in 1917, the *Bulletin de Roubaix* explained to its readers that the combined danger of airplane attacks and the need to save energy meant they should restrict lighting as much as possible.²² Another warning asked readers in Roubaix to immediately report to the closest authorities if they found any unexploded shells, and not to touch them because the danger of death – giving the dictate the echo of a paternal warning.²³ The fatherly advice quality of “Acts of German Authority” appeared again when readers learned of a deadly accident caused by picking up a hand grenade and the German occupiers used the story as a warning to inform the authorities of any live ammunition.²⁴ The *Bulletin de Roubaix* also lacked the menacing sub-column “German Military Justice,” that commonly dominated the Lille newspaper. The newspaper occasionally included sentences handed down by the German authorities, but in only one issue did criminal

²⁰ *Bulletin de Roubaix*., December 27, 1916.

²¹ *Ibid.*, February 21, 1917.

²² *Bulletin de Lille*, January 7, 1917 and *Bulletin de Roubaix*, March 3, 1917.

²³ *Bulletin de Roubaix*, February 2, 1918.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, May 8, 1918.

sentences dominant the paper. In this one issue, the reporting of sentences by German authorities seemed clearly to have been meant to instill fear in the population. On September 1, 1917, the entire front side of the paper and a portion of the flipside consisted of a sub-section of “Acts of German Authority,” entitled “Sentenced.” In total, the article listed sixty-three people and their punishments. The least severe punishments included were a seven-week sentence for the unauthorized selling of a horse and a three-month sentence for theft. The most spectacular cases, and perhaps the instigations of this ominous article, included the Abbé Jules Pinte’s receipt of a ten and half year sentence for possessing a telegraph, and Joseph Willot and Firmin Dubar receiving ten year sentences (in Dubar’s case ten years and one month) for the hostile act of editing and publishing an uncensored paper.²⁵ The newspaper also reported upon executions of people outside of Roubaix in this section four times, information that clearly meant to serve as a warning.²⁶ Such heavy-handedness was the exception in the *Bulletin de Roubaix* but the norm in the *Bulletin de Lille*. The newspaper did not refer to the deportations of French men and women, which one witness described as nothing more than brutal and undisguised slave raids.²⁷

In Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, German-set curfews were ever changing and the occupied received harsh punishments if they disobeyed these curfews. This regulation on daily life carried the extra insult as the Germans ordered “German central time,” to be used, a fact that caused extensive bitterness.²⁸ The phrase,

²⁵ Ibid., September 1, 1917. For details about the newspaper created by these three men, see the clandestine press chapter.

²⁶ Ibid., September 26, 1917; June 1, 1918; August 17, 1918 and August 21, 1918.

²⁷ Whitaker, 526.

²⁸ McPhail, 46. German central time moved the clocks back one hour from the time used before the occupation.

“German central time” confronted readers of the *Bulletin de Lille* with every time reference in “Acts of German Authority.” In the Roubaix newspaper, writers did not utilize this offensive term; hours within “Acts of German Authority,” specified “central European time,” and often the paper carried a reminder outside the “Acts of German Authority” section that all times indicated were “public time.”²⁹ It is surprising that writers used the phrase “public time,” for it suggested that in the privacy of people’s homes, “French” time was still used, which would have been an act of defiance against the Germans. In one issue, under “Notices from City Hall,” the French civil servants forced to work under the Germans, utilized the wording “army time”³⁰ Different wording for the same regulations did not change their meaning, but it slightly lessened the propaganda message that the Germans were so entrenched in the occupied zone that one could never hope they would be gone.

German administrative policies in northern France developed haphazardly, often through trial and error, with an orderly system with clear traits only developing almost two years into the war.³¹ Commandants of cities and towns had leeway in how they governed their realms. Hence some of the difference in styles of “Acts of German Authority” could be attributed to the different approaches of General von Heinrich in Lille and Commandant Hofmann in Roubaix. Moreover, von Heinrich signed the vast majority of “Acts of German Authority” in Lille, which is not surprising since he included orders and demands given to the civilian administration during his frequent Commandant’s conferences. Both von Heinrich and Hofmann ruled their areas punctiliously, but Hofmann did not report with the same frequency

²⁹ “heurs des horloges publiques.” *Bulletin de Roubaix*, September 22, 1917.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, July 10, 1918.

³¹ Gatzke, 84.

smaller affairs, such as bar and café closings.³² While Hofmann was responsible for more declarations in the *Bulletin de Roubaix* than any other person, several other voices also emerged. Von Tessin, the Commandant of Tourcoing, did publish decrees, but usually limited himself to reiterating Hofmann's message. However, over ten other German leaders also placed notices in the Roubaix newspaper, including not only various inspectors working under Hofmann, but military leaders who saw Roubaix and its surrounding areas as part of their battlefield.³³ German military leaders also viewed Lille as part of their battlefield, but the authoritative von Heinrich controlled almost all contact with the civilian occupied population, including issuing orders in the *Bulletin de Lille*.

Notices from City Halls

The column was entitled "Notices from City Halls," (with "city hall" pluralized) but the majority of the information came from the Roubaix administration, with less frequent notices from nearby Mouvaux, Toufflers, Hem, Croix, Wattrelos, and Tourcoing. As in the *Bulletin de Lille*, this section habitually reiterated German demands. An often-utilized format was to announce under this heading that city hall received a notice from the German authorities making the mayor responsible for ensuring public obedience to German regulations, such as those requiring posting lists of inhabitants on the front doors of homes, declaring all dogs, or not changing one's

³² *Bulletin de Roubaix*, November 3, 1917. This is the only noted exception, when "Acts of German Authority" included a note that the German occupiers ordered two drinking establishments closed down because the bars had stayed open past curfew.

³³ Examples include infantry general Sixt von Armin and von Quast. *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*, July 21, 1917 and April 3, 1918.

residence without permission.³⁴ This created an impression of collaboration at times when the mayor co-signed notices with the commandant, such as one in January 1918, on the distribution of hay for horses.³⁵ Akin to public reaction to similar attempts by the Germany to create an impression of collaboration, the respect the occupied people kept for their local leaders suggests they knew it was involuntary collaboration.

Along with the birth, death, and marriage notices usually found on the back page of the paper, it was the news that appeared under this heading that mostly likely drew readers to the *Bulletin de Roubaix*. Without prisoner of war lists like those in the *Gazette des Ardennes* to entice an audience, it was news about all the important roles the civilian government took on during the occupation that made the Roubaix paper indispensable to people's lives. Readers could regularly expect to find information about state allocation hand-out dates, changes in ration provisions, the availability of supplies such as coal and chip wood to the population, special distributions of goods such as vegetables, the maximum prices the Germans allowed merchants to charge, and pharmacists available during non-business hours. Also included was news from the locally operated Comité d'Alimentation de Roubaix (although news from the larger Comité d'Alimentation du Nord de la France was given under its own heading).³⁶ It is interesting to note that the only written piece in the *Bulletin de Roubaix* emanating from outside occupied France and not from another German-controlled paper was a letter about attempts to supply the area from the Comité de Ravitaillement des Villes Envahies du Nord de la France, which

³⁴ Ibid., March 2, 1918; May 11, 1918 and August 28, 1918.

³⁵ Ibid., January 9, 1918.

³⁶ Ibid., July 17, 1918.

operated out of Paris. The information in the newspaper made clear how vital the food supplied by the committee was to the people of Roubaix.

As so many goods were extremely scarce during the second half of the war, officials often held lotteries for resources or goods. Reading the *Bulletin de Roubaix* was a good way to find out about such drawings and if one's number had been lucky, whether it was for a section of public garden space or shoes.³⁷ The food problem was as severe in Roubaix as Lille. When the German closed the Belgian-French frontier, the effect was to reduce to an "insignificant trickle" the profuse stream of foodstuffs that Roubaix imported from Belgium.³⁸ The city became reliant upon food and supplies brought in by the American Relief Commission. It opened a food depot, run in cities such as Roubaix by local committees. These committees issued vouchers for basic items, and people lined up at the depot to hopefully attain their allotted rations of items such as rice, lard, coffee, bread, and occasionally condensed milk, and small amounts of sugar.³⁹ The newspaper informed readers of when the Commission had various items available, but did not hint at the corruption that plagued the system at a local level.

A seven-part series running from January through March 1918 about how to detect fake vouchers also began under the "Notices from City Halls" banner.⁴⁰ A hint given in the February 6, 1918, issue advised readers to accept no vouchers bearing the name of the commune of "Lersvin," since no commune named Lersvin existed. The

³⁷ Ibid., April 24, 1918 and May 8, 1918.

³⁸ Whitaker, 526.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ This series was included in the following issues, *Bulletin de Roubaix*, January 26, 1918; January 30, 1918; February 6, 1918 (from this point on the articles were no longer under the "Notices from City Halls" heading) February 16, 1918; March 2, 1918; March 9, 1918 and March 6, 1918.

newspaper also shared other critical facts, such as when water became unpotable and people had to boil it to ensure they would not become sick, under “Notices from City Halls.”⁴¹ It would not be melodramatic to state the news under this heading was vital to the existence of many people.

Theatre, Sports, and Other Distractions

The Roubaisian poet Amédée Provost rather harshly described his city as a town “without an artistic past, without beauty, and without history.”⁴² The people of Roubaix proved Provost wrong at least on the first part by working diligently to continue the cultural life of the city to the extent possible. During its first year of publication, the *Bulletin de Roubaix* featured regular news under the headings “Theatre Chronicle,” and “Sports Chronicle.” These sections added a flavor of normalcy to the otherwise survival-based focus of the paper. Starting in the fifth issue of the paper readers could expect under the section-title “Roubaix Matinées,” theatre reviews, performance schedules, and notices for up-coming performances. The newspaper reported upon concerts to benefit the poor, including how much money they raised. A newspaper writer deemed an early event a success, both because of the quality of music played and because it raised over 778 francs for the poor.⁴³ While a few events raised money for the committee for the aid of prisoners, most of the productions aided the poor, sick, children, and seniors. This was a continuation of pre-war charity work. A dedicated religious and patriarchal

⁴¹ Ibid., October 16, 1918.

⁴² “ville sans passé d’art, sans beauté et sans histoire.” As cited in, Timothy Pooley, *Chtimi: The Urban Vernaculars of Northern France* (Clevedon, Eng.: Multilingual Matters, Ltd., 1996), 18.

⁴³ *Bulletin de Roubaix*, January 20, 1917.

bourgeoisie organized to protect working class families with a fervor that set Roubaix apart from other industrial cities.⁴⁴

The paper's staff published reviews of performances in Lille by various charitable organizations until the German occupiers forbade travel between the two cities without an expensive and hard-to-obtain pass, but coverage of Roubaix events continued. At times coverage was quite extensive, one time even taking up approximately a quarter of the paper.⁴⁵ Between late October 1917 and early March 1918, only one edition carried any theatre news.⁴⁶ Then on March 9, and March 13, 1918, the newspaper included a long, two-part article on the history of theatre in Roubaix. Jacques du Hutin chronicled the history of theatre in Roubaix back seventy-five years, specifically noting the city's rich history in amateur theatre. He wrote that theatre was important to the working class, who toiled thirteen or fourteen hours a day and that during the 1860s even the mayor supported the amateur troop.⁴⁷ This was the last time "Theatre Chronicle" appeared in the paper.⁴⁸ The article seemed almost an homage to the theatre work described in the newspaper, which combined artistic lessons and performances, with the proceeds going to charity. It disappeared with no explanation as to whether the newspaper staff simply chose to devote the paper's limited space to other information, or if theatre events stopped occurring in Roubaix.

Sports coverage followed a similar path to that of theatre coverage, although

⁴⁴ David Levine, et al. *Essay on the Family and Historical Change* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1983), 51.

⁴⁵ *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*, April 14, 1917.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, January 1, 1918.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, March 9, 1918.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, March 9, 1918 and March 13, 1918.

editors did not formally head this material “Sports Chronicle” until the thirty-eighth issue. Reporting of the results of football matches (i.e. American soccer) began in the sixth issue of the paper. Until the ban on travel, coverage included multiple cities’ teams, including ones from Roubaix, such as the Racing Club de Roubaix, Lille’s the Étoile Club Lillois and teams from Tourcoing, including the Association Sportive Tourquenoise and l’Union Sportive Tourquenoise.⁴⁹ Like theatre performances, there could be a charitable objective to these events; at least one tournament benefited charity during the occupation.⁵⁰ At least two of the teams, the Racing Club de Roubaix and the Union Sportive Tourquenoise were semi-professional teams before the war, playing other national teams in the Union de Sociétés Français de Sports Athlétiques. Established in 1895, the Racing Club de Roubaix was USFSA champion in 1902, 1903, 1904, 1906, and 1908. According to the International Federation of Football History and Statistics, these teams had ties with teams in Britain and Belgium, as players moved from area to area.⁵¹ The website also notes that several players from these teams fought and lost their lives in the war. It appears that the players that remained played local exhibition charity games. It is possible that the Etoile Club Lillois was comprised of players from the two Lille-based USFSA teams, the Olympique Lillois and the Iris Club Lillois. It is unclear how there were enough men to play on these teams after so many men mobilized for war before the occupation, perhaps the team relied on older and younger men.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid., January 6, 1917; January 27, 1917 and February 21, 1917.

⁵⁰ Ibid., April 7, 1917.

⁵¹ www.iffhs.de

⁵² Women’s football experienced a pattern of growth in Roubaix right before and during the war, but their amateur games did not make the pages of the *Bulletin de Roubaix*. Alethea Melling, “Cultural Differentiation, Shared Aspiration: The Entente Cordiale of International Ladies’ Football, 1920-1945,” *Sports in Europe: Politics, Class, Gender*, J.A. Mangan, ed. (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 30.

All sports news, like that of theatre, could be erratic, and it disappeared for forty-three installments, beginning with the May 2, 1917, issue. Sports coverage only appeared three more times during the life of the *Bulletin de Roubaix*, with its last appearance being coverage of a Roubaix-Tourcoing match, on June 8, 1918.⁵³ Such as the case with the theatre productions, it is unclear whether any games took place after this date and the newspaper simply did not cover them.

This was not the end of all sports -and entertainment- related news pieces. Starting four issues after the erratic sports coverage ended, the paper began running a column entitled “Recreational time-passers.”⁵⁴ This seven-part series discussed various moves in the board game of checkers, with illustrated photos to demonstrate them.⁵⁵ Incorporating such mundane items as pretend checker matches in a paper whose editors frequently lamented the lack of space they had to publish news was a trend that developed during the second half of the paper’s run. Newspaper editors frequently relied upon “filler” items, written to plug news holes.⁵⁶ One could imagine that under German occupation, when censors so freely rejected sentences and stories, inoffensive filler items would have been even more useful.⁵⁷ The newspaper included a great number of non-news pieces; often of such a length and in such great frequency that these items’ role was to do more than fill minor gaps. From the very beginning, the *Bulletin de Roubaix* published what today’s media consumers would dismiss as “fluff” pieces, which did not carry any intrinsic news value. The second issue of the

⁵³ *Bulletin de Roubaix*, June 8, 1918.

⁵⁴ “Passe-Temps Récréatif.” *Ibid.*, June 22, 1918.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, June 29, 1918; July 6, 1918; July 13, 1918; July 24, 1918; August 7, 1918 and September 25, 1918.

⁵⁶ Chris Frost, *Designing for Newspaper and Magazines* (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 58.

⁵⁷ *Le Bulletin de Roubaix* did not go to print with blank spaces the way circumstances forced some other newspapers published under German occupation to.

paper included a poem about Christmas dedicated to mothers and their little children.⁵⁸ Three issues carried the lyrics to a ballad about a woman obtaining supplies.⁵⁹

One interesting trend in the publication of non-news in the newspaper was to highlight a certain small nearby town, neighborhood, street, or natural landmark and provide a brief history explaining how it got its name. This occurred seven times, with subjects including Barbieux Park, Tilleul and Cartigny Streets.⁶⁰ Jacques du Hutin's name appeared on the by-line of three of these articles, while the others carried no indication of authorship. In Lille, the Germans went so far as to change the names of the streets and squares to reflect their authority, but chose not to in Roubaix.⁶¹ Allowing these articles suggests that the Germans were not trying to use the *Bulletin de Roubaix* as a propaganda weapon, but at the same time, they did not haphazardly choose what sites to highlight. In the April 17, 1918, issue of the *Bulletin de Roubaix*, an article appeared by Jacques du Hutin occupying the entire second column of the first page. Entitled "The Cradle of Roubaix," the article traced the history of the *Trichon*, a large creek running through Roubaix and Tourcoing.⁶² Most of the article focused upon the early history of the creek, tracing it back to ancient Rome. The article noted that scholars believed four different groups of people lived near or utilized the *Trichon*, including Germanic tribes.⁶³ This article not only tied the area to a time before the countries of France and German existed, it

⁵⁸ Ibid., December 23, 1916.

⁵⁹ "Caroline au Ravitaillement." Ibid., January 23, 1918; January 26, 1918 and January 30, 1918.

⁶⁰ Ibid., July 21, 1917; August 11, 1917; February 23, 1918 and July 27, 1918.

⁶¹ Cobb, *French and Germans, Germans and French*, 8.

⁶² "Berceau de Roubaix."

⁶³ *Bulletin de Roubaix*, April 17, 1918.

implied that the French were not the only ones with historical ties to the area. Somewhat of a “fluff” piece, the historical information included was so general that it was not incorrect but also not meaningful. Another article, author unknown, stated a reader wrote in curious about the etymology of the name “Roubaix.”⁶⁴ Again, in this briefer article, this time situated on the second page of the newspaper (an issue produced on pink paper), the history lesson dates back hundreds of years, to the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries. People spelled the name of the city over fifteen different ways during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with Roubaix and Rosbacum being the most frequently utilized. By the thirteenth century the number of forms of the name was down to nine, with Roubaix eventually emerging as the accepted name.⁶⁵

In non-occupied zones during the war, filler stories in newspapers usually were comprised of patriotic “fluff.” Here it seems the editors chose filler pieces because they were non-controversial distractions. By June 1918, it appears part of the newspaper’s mandate had become to distract the population from both their own miserable existence and the obvious signs of growing German weakness. Five issues during this time carried benign scientific articles on subjects including an overview of the human heart and the potential for making artificial rain.⁶⁶ One edition provided no current information beyond “Notices from City Hall,” with the remainder of the paper filled with articles on how to read a barometer and bird wakeup times.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid., October 6, 1917.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., June 8, 1918 and June 12, 1918.

⁶⁷ Ibid., June 19, 1918.

One run of apparently frivolous articles was a nine-part series on the characteristics of various shepherd dogs.⁶⁸ It is worthwhile to examine this long series on shepherd dogs, as at first glance it appeared a rather innocuous topic. Most people have some warm sentiments towards dogs, and even those who do not, hardly consider them a controversial topic. However, in occupied Roubaix, the subject of dogs was contentious. Ruth Wright Kauffmann interviewed a Madame Reboux (it is unclear whether this was the same Madame Reboux that worked for *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*) after she escaped after living in occupied Roubaix for twenty-six months. Madame Reboux told of the repercussions of the German occupiers placing a forty-franc tax on each domestic dog, "...In our part of France everyone loved his dog...the injustice – the impossibility; forty francs in a starving town... so we all consulted together and acted. The next morning, the Germans saw floating, drowned in the canal, the bodies of every dog in our part of Roubaix. And wrapped over the body of each dog was a French flag."⁶⁹ Under "Acts of German Authority," the *Bulletin de Roubaix* warned readers that the Germans forbade killing one's pet dog if they were unable to pay the tax.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the series focused upon the group of dogs most associated with specific countries. In medieval Europe, regions developed local herding dogs to fulfill their own unique needs. With the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century, it became important to some to have a respectable sheep dog representing one's own nation. Noting the popularity of Scottish collies at the end of the nineteenth century, German dog aficionados aimed to develop their own shepherd

⁶⁸ This series ran during June and July of 1918. The articles may have enjoyed some popularity with the readership, as at least one person wrote into the paper to ask why the newspaper editors discontinued the series. *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*, August 3, 1918.

⁶⁹ Ruth Wright Kauffmann, "The Dogs of Roubaix," *The Red Cross Magazine* (January 1918): 21.

⁷⁰ *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*, April 4, 1917.

dog by combining various local types. Two men, Max von Strephanitz and Artur Meyer bred the modern-day German shepherd in 1899.⁷¹ This series discussed the German shepherd alongside those types that inspired their breeding, including the English collie and Belgian sheepdog. While dogs had a long history in northern France, working both alongside families and enjoying their leisure time, no one breed of dog was especially associated with the area.⁷² Moreover, this series appeared in June and July 1918, and in August, the war decisively turned against Germany.⁷³ It is uncertain whether this series was simply meant to distract the population, or came from a German directive to rub salt in a citywide wound.

Like the *Bulletin de Lille*, the Roubaix newspaper carried another non-news section, an advice column. Starting late in the summer of 1917, people wrote in with questions to which the editors provided answers. The newspaper's editorial staff warned people that they must provide their name and address if they wanted their letter to be printed. Like respondents to a similar column in Lille, many people seemed concerned with laws regarding leases during wartime, and there was at least one article involving bigamy.⁷⁴ During peace time bigamy was a rare crime in France, because it was an extremely difficult offense to commit without authorities discovering the crime.⁷⁵ However, in periods of catastrophe, such as war, normal modes of communication break down, allowing potential bigamists to go unnoticed.

⁷¹ Katherine Rogers, *First Friend: A History of Dogs and Humans*. (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2010), 75.

⁷² Graham Robb, *Discovery of France: A Historical Geography* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2007), 165-170. Robb devotes a chapter of his book to the role animals played in the history of France, with several pages dedicated to dogs.

⁷³ Burg and Purcell, 193.

⁷⁴ *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*, September 14, 1918.

⁷⁵ Richard Cobb, *Paris and Elsewhere* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1998), 56.

Combined with the weakening matrimonial ties and the governments' focus upon other matters, war has historically been a time of increased bigamy.

Cooking with limited supplies was also a recurring theme in "Minor Information Requested," including advice on how to salvage potatoes that froze accidentally.⁷⁶ Apparently, there also existed a heavy demand for abstruse, general information on topics such as the history of Titus and Romulus, how to train a parrot, and a description of a troubadour.⁷⁷ Such trivialities may have been fabricated by editors to distract readers; certainly they must have irked some, as by June 1918 few people in Roubaix barely had enough to eat, let alone the means to be concerned with training an exotic pet. Along with the advice column, this information was similar to the women's sections of many newspapers before the war. Such sections contained relationship advice, recipes, and fashion trends.⁷⁸

"Acts of Decency" started appearing in the *Bulletin de Roubaix* in its tenth issue. Sometimes it appeared under "Acts of City Halls," and sometimes under its own banner, but the type of stories featured remained constant. The moral was manifest: hardship is not an excuse for dishonesty, even if that dishonesty is that passive type of not returning found objects. Almost every example reads like that of a young woman from Tourcoing who returned 700 francs she found after mass in church despite the fact that her husband was extremely ill and that they were completely without resources.⁷⁹ The amounts might have varied, and sometimes the

⁷⁶ "Petits Renseignements Demandés." *Bulletin de Roubaix*, December 8, 1914.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, January 9, 1918; January 30, 1918 and June 8, 1918.

⁷⁸ Paula Poindexter and Dustin Harp, "The Softer Side of News," in *Women, Men, and News: Divided and Disconnected in the Media Landscape*, Paul Poindexter and Sharon Meraz, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 100. Poindexter and Harp also note that women's sections of newspapers were also the first arena that discussed many gender issues, such as women voting and birth control.

⁷⁹ *Bulletin de Roubaix*, December 22, 1917.

lost items were ration cards, vouchers, or jewels, but the basic tale was the same. One has to question the intelligence of one article that gave the name and address of a woman who lost her wallet with the substantial sum of 600 francs in it, and had it returned to her, potentially pointing out to the desperate or unscrupulous a potential robbery victim. During a time of great need, “Acts of Decency” may have been an advertisement for the dishonest but common behavior of robbery. While this may have been a risk posed by the regular column, the public lauding of honest people seemed intended to encourage integrity during a time when morality became a malleable concept. If one’s conscience was not enough to ensure honesty, perhaps the possibility of brief celebrity might encourage decency, as the names and addresses of the good samaritans graced the newspaper’s pages. Juxtaposed against these stories, crime was a crucial concentration of the paper, as its regular feature, the “Judicial Chronicle,” demonstrated.

Civilian Court Coverage

The first “Judicial Chronicle” appeared in the twentieth issue of the *Bulletin de Roubaix* and from that point on it was a common segment of the paper. It contained highlights from the Correctional Tribunal of Lille. Before the war broke out, the French judicial system consisted of a comprehensive court system at various levels, embodying the goal of the revolutionaries of 1789 of easy accessibility to justice for most French citizens.⁸⁰ In the national criminal court system, (as opposed to the civil court system, or specialized courts, including labor, commercial and social security courts) there were several hundred police courts (*tribunaux de police*) that

⁸⁰ William Safran, *The French Polity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1985), 232-233.

heard cases that in Anglo-American procedure would be classified misdemeanors and over a hundred higher courts (*tribunaux correctionnels*) that heard felonies that merited a prison sentence of less than a decade.⁸¹ The Correctional Tribunal of Lille was one of the latter courts, and heard important criminal cases for the area, including Roubaix and Tourcoing. Timothy Pooley notes, in time of prosperity it mattered little to the cities of Roubaix and Tourcoing that the Préfecture, Palais de Justice, the Cathedral, and University were all in Lille, with the other two cities relying exclusively economic vocations.⁸² Occupation made having these regional institutions in Lille problematic for the people of Tourcoing and Roubaix.

At first, the reports of the Correctional Tribunal's activities in the *Bulletin de Roubaix* were somewhat current. For example, the March 14, 1917, issue carried cases heard on March 3, 1917. However, the newspaper soon fell behind, and by the end of November 1917, the newspaper was only reporting on cases from July 1917.⁸³ Eventually the paper skipped four months worth of incident reports to become more up to date.⁸⁴ It appears that the editors of the *Bulletin de Roubaix* especially selected cases concerning people from the area. Thus, the newspaper published the condemnations of residents of Roubaix and Tourcoing in the March and April 1917 issues.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ibid., 232-3. The French penal system also included *cours d'assises*, with one in each département, which convened to oversee serious crimes subject to severe penalties, including imprisonment over ten years and confiscation of property. It does not appear that any *cours d'assises* convened during the German occupation, most likely because the occupying forces oversaw such cases. The newspaper did not report on any capital cases dealt with by French courts.

⁸² Pooley, 23.

⁸³ *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*, November 28, 1917.

⁸⁴ Ibid., May 11, 1918. After consistently reporting proceedings in chronological order, the "Judicial Chronicle" simply omitted any references to cases occurring during the months of September through December 1918.

⁸⁵ Ibid., March 31, 1917 and April 4, 1917.

Most of the published cases centered upon people charged with cheating their fellow citizens when selling wares, people defrauding the aid systems, child, and spousal abuse, and stealing. For example one woman in Roubaix stood accused of selling fake cleaning products, another with selling adulterated milk, and a third woman in Lille received a fifty franc fine for adding flour to extend the mustard she sold.⁸⁶ The penalty for taking undeserved military allocations was much greater, as one person earned a three-month prison sentence for their deception.⁸⁷ The newspaper paid special attention to cases dealing with the mistreatment of children, such as the one of the Tourcoing woman sentenced to six months in jail for abusing her children.⁸⁸ An eyewitness wrote at the time that, despite the temptations of crime, which were great for the mostly idle and needy population of Roubaix, there were very few civilian offenses against either French or German law committed by the inhabitants of Roubaix.⁸⁹ Witaker suggested the “bridled savagery of the German gendarmeries” provided the people of Roubaix the inducement to keep within the law,⁹⁰ perhaps even extending to French matters.

It is clear that people read the “Judicial Chronicle,” and looked down their collective noses at the persons making the lives of their fellow citizens of the occupied zone harder through dishonest acts. On four separate occasions blurbs under the heading “Namesakes” appeared, stating that a person mentioned in connection to a court case was not a relative of a local family. For example, Edmond

⁸⁶ Ibid., April 18, 1917; November 17, 1917 and January 23, 1918.

⁸⁷ Ibid., January 26, 1918.

⁸⁸ Ibid., May 26, 1917.

⁸⁹ J.P. Whitaker, “Under German Rule in France and Belgium: A Young Englishman’s Experience,” in *The New York Times Current History: The European War, April – June 1917* (New York: New York Times, 1917), 529.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 530.

van Lede, a painter and tapestry maker, wanted everyone to know that he was no relation to the van Lede condemned by the correctional tribunal of Lille.⁹¹ In another example a woman whose name only sound liked that of a convicted man wanted to put an end to the confusion that she was a relation of someone who had stolen harvested food.⁹² These responses to the crime reporting section of the paper suggest that readers believed this part of the *Bulletin de Roubaix* was a credible source of information. The activities of the Correctional Tribunal of Lille were a rare example of Frenchmen exerting control over their own community. It made fiscal sense for the German occupiers to require the French court system to continue to oversee relatively minor infractions. However, it is surprising that German censors allowed the editors of the *Bulletin de Roubaix* to publish the Correctional Tribunal's decisions, as this practice undermined the image the Germans wanted to create of themselves being the sole source of authority in the occupied zone.

Very late into the newspaper's publication, it began to carry additional crime reports under the titles "Local Chronicle," and "Roubaix Justice of the Peace." The "Local Chronicle," which appeared in all but four editions between July and October 1918, told of crimes committed, as opposed to stories of people arrested and sentenced. In one article, the writer told of vegetables stolen from someone's backyard garden.⁹³ It is surprising that the German controllers allowed this section in the paper, as it revealed that people were committing crimes, including violations of the German-imposed curfew, and those crimes were going unsolved. These few articles undermined the appearance of the omnipotent German authority that the rest

⁹¹ *Bulletin de Roubaix*, March 21, 1917.

⁹² *Ibid.*, July 27, 1918.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1918.

of the paper attempted to convey.

The “Roubaix Justice of the Peace,” was not a successful endeavor for the newspaper. Appearing only twice in its pages, the first article told of a disagreement between two neighbors and the damages that the court declared one side deserved.⁹⁴ The second installment had to provide a clarification for the first after one of the neighbors filed a complaint with the newspaper about the misrepresentation of the events. The role of the justice of the peace was to arbitrate disagreements before they escalated and became the purview of a civil or special court. These two late additions to the newspaper did not replace coverage from the Lille Tribunal but ran alongside it, making the *Bulletin de Roubaix* very heavy with news of crime and retribution, but giving the impression that the Germans did not control every aspect of communal life.

Conclusion

The *Bulletin de Roubaix* did not provide a great deal of information and news about the current state of political and military affairs in Roubaix or in the larger world outside the occupied zone of France. If a hypothetical Roubaisian remained truly sheltered within their home, with only the *Bulletin de Roubaix* as a source of information, that person would not even have known the Germans were showing signs of losing the war prior to the very last edition of the paper, printed November 16, 1918, a month after the last German-controlled issue was published. The tone of complete German domination remained until the last German-published issue, in which the editors had to acknowledge that Allied troops had bombed Lille, Roubaix,

⁹⁴ Ibid., August 24, 1918.

and Tourcoing.⁹⁵ However, the people of Roubaix knew that the end was fast approaching for their German occupiers. As Philip Gibbs reported for the *New York Times* in October 1918, the Germans could not hide from the civilians that their system of control was breaking up as “their horses became so thin and starved that even in the streets of Lille they used to drop dead ... [the German soldiers] became pinched and pallid.”⁹⁶ Reporting in the *Bulletin de Roubaix* did not reflect the Germans’ weakening position. Readers knew the paper did not reflect the truth of what was happening in their city.

Very little news from outside the occupied zone permeated the *Bulletin de Roubaix*’s pages. While this newspaper attempted to fill the void left by local, rather than national newspapers, the lack of reference to international events is noteworthy. Other than news of executions in German-occupied Belgium, the number of articles providing news of the war numbered less than five. Readers, for example, learned of the German and Austrian victory against the Italians on the Isonzo that was part of the Italian collapse in the Battle of Caporetto during the fall of 1917 and of the peace talks in Brest-Litovsk that would lead to the Russians exiting the war.⁹⁷ The information and tone in these examples correspond with the coverage the events received in *La Gazette des Ardennes*. The newspaper vaunted the Russian exit from the war with such jubilation as to sound like victory for the Germans was certain, while not mentioning the American entrance into the war. The article described the Austro-German success in crossing the Isonzo River and taking the town of

⁹⁵ Ibid., October 16, 1918.

⁹⁶ Philip Gibbs, “Enemy Lost Heart in Face of Defeat,” *The New York Times*, October 31, 1918.

⁹⁷ *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*, November 7, 1917 and January 12, 1918.

Caporetto, but did not include their use of gas shells to achieve it.⁹⁸ The article did not have to exaggerate the Italian divisions' breakdown. Other than these two articles clearly aimed at illustrating German dominance in the war, the newspaper included no stories about battles or diplomatic activities. Early in the publishing of the paper, one article estimated and discussed the free French harvest and another discussed the treatment of French prisoners of war held in Germany.⁹⁹ Both these stories were reprints of articles from German-controlled papers in other occupied zones, although the French harvest article was originally from the *Journal Officiel de Paris*.¹⁰⁰ A few obituaries of important French figures in unoccupied France, such as the musician Claude Debussy, also made rare appearances in the *Bulletin de Roubaix*.¹⁰¹ However, this dissertation's contention that more news filtered into occupied France than formerly supposed, does not rest on what information was available through this particular paper – other sources support this assertion.

The *Bulletin de Roubaix* played a limited but important role in informing its isolated readers. It notified them of the German authorities' ever-changing rules and regulations and what help was available to them in the form of rations and allocations. It did not consistently attempt to terrorize and demoralize the populace as the *Bulletin de Lille* did, but rather at times tried to distract people with inconsequential articles on things such as the habits of swallows.¹⁰² For a long while the paper did serve as a tenuous connection between Lille and Roubaix. This newspaper suggests the disconnection and isolation between Roubaix – Tourcoing

⁹⁸ Burg and Purcell, 184.

⁹⁹ *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*, February 24, 1917 and March 3, 1917.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, February 24, 1917.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, April 10, 1918.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, June 5, 1918.

and Lille was not as great as sometimes imagined. *Le Bulletin de Roubaix* maintained an office in Lille, and provided free home delivery in that city when readers requested a three-month subscription.¹⁰³ The paper published the tramway timetable until the Germans invoked rules making travel between the two cities extremely difficult and included news about the theatre in Lille for a while. Some news from the bigger city also came also through in the form of advertisements and tidbits of news in the Judicial Chronicle. Indeed the *Bulletin de Roubaix* appeared to provide a somewhat modest connection to the outside world. Of course, one must remember the newspaper portrayed life in occupied Roubaix and Tourcoing as the German occupiers wanted people to see it.

¹⁰³ Ibid., January 20, 1917, and February 10, 1917.

Chapter Six:

La Gazette des Ardennes

People in occupied France received the largest percentage of their news from *La Gazette des Ardennes*. Published from November 1, 1914, through October 21, 1918, *La Gazette* provided regular, voluminous, in-depth coverage of the war and international affairs several times a week. An advertisement for the newspaper proclaimed that it carried official communiqués from Britain, France, and Germany, as well as the names of prisoners of war held in Germany and regional news from different areas of the occupied zone. It claimed to provide “all daily news concerning the European war.”¹ The paper was widely read. At its height, the publishers claimed a circulation of 175,000 per issue.² Deborah Buffton notes that this was a dramatic decline in circulation compared to pre-war newspapers. In the tri-city area, numerous newspapers enjoyed a wide circulation just before the war, with *L’Echo du Nord* alone selling over 180,000 copies per day.³ However, she also explains this did not mean *La Gazette des Ardennes* was relatively ignored by the occupied populace. Some people may have avoided the newspaper due to a distrust of news through German sources, but people also shared copies of the paper due to financial considerations, leading to a higher level of readership than circulation numbers suggest. The paper cost 5 centimes, or 10 centimes with prisoner of war lists. It became available in the tri-city region around December 1914, with many places to buy it in the cities, including bookstores and post offices. By mid-1915, an official German

¹ “toutes les nouvelles du jour concernant la guerre européenne.” *La Gazette des Ardennes*, May 21, 1917.

² While the Germans made a majority of the issues available in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, *La Gazette* was also available in smaller occupied towns, and even intermittently to prisoners of war.

³ Buffton, 7-8.

ordinance prohibited the reading of any newspaper except the *Gazette des Ardennes*, *Bulletin de Lille*, or the *Bulletin de Roubaix*.⁴

La Gazette des Ardennes celebrated its one-year anniversary by reminding its readers that the German authorities' kindness created this newspaper to bring them truth and justice in a time characterized by misinformation.⁵ While the occupied population read this paper, they did not believe it to be a beacon of truth in a world of lies. To the contrary, one reader noted that to understand what was really happening in the war, the truth had to be "discerned" from *La Gazette des Ardennes*.⁶ People read it with resignation. Articles were longer and hence allowed more leeway for the insertion of propaganda in *La Gazette des Ardennes* as compared to *Le Bulletin de Lille* and *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*. Unlike these other newspapers, which included a great deal of non-news pieces, hard news pieces comprised most of *La Gazette des Ardennes*. Describing it as "Boche poison," one reader stated that the paper's *raison d'être* was to compromise the spirit of the invaded and to detach them from the rest of France. He stated, however, that no one was being intoxicated, and the crass message of the paper instead inspired a spirit of sacrifice among the occupied.⁷ The French in the occupied zone had such a low opinion of the occupying Germans, a fact the Germans themselves admitted in the pages of *Liller Kriegszeitung*, that it is not surprising that a newspaper produced by the Germans was not respected.⁸ Thus, the aim of the newspaper, to reduce French hostility

⁴ McPhail, 129. Presumably the German-controlled Belgian newspaper, *Le Bruxellois* was an exception.

⁵ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, October 31, 1915.

⁶ *Journal des réfugiés du Nord*, March 4, 1916.

⁷ *Ibid.*, January 17, 1917.

⁸ Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre: Humanitaire et culture de guerre* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2003), 39.

and prepare northern France for a future characterized by close ties to Germany, was an ambitious one.⁹

After a brief overview of the administration and the mechanics of the publication of *La Gazette des Ardennes*, this chapter examines what information this newspaper provided to the people of Lille, starting December 27, 1914, and shortly thereafter the people of Roubaix, and Tourcoing. Essentially the *Gazette des Ardennes* provided its readers five categories of news: 1) war news, including information from the battlefield, lists of prisoners and the dead, and submarine and zeppelin activity; 2) news about unoccupied France; 3) negative information about Germany's enemies; 4) information revealing an obsession with the Parisian press; 5) positive news about Germany. These five themes, along with an examination of serials and advertisements in the newspaper reveal that a great deal of information was available through this paper, but almost all of it came with a dose of bias.

Administration and Publication

La Gazette des Ardennes was a military enterprise, under Section IIIb of the general staff, and its head, Colonel Walter Nicolai.¹⁰ Captain Fritz H. Schnitzer directed the newspaper, but he was not a journalist and quickly sought a journalist as editor of the newspaper. After two failed attempts utilizing amateur journalists, Gaspari and Teschemacer, the newspaper found its permanent editor, René Prévot. Prévot, the Paris correspondent for the German newspaper *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten*, was born in

⁹ Marc Blancpain, *La vie quotidienne dans la France du Nord sous les occupations (1814-1944)* (Paris: Hachette, 1983), 289.

¹⁰ Laska, 135.

Alsace but became a naturalized German and married an Austrian woman.¹¹ He wrote French fluently while fully supporting German war aims.¹² He was an excellent editor. One French reader living through the occupation described the newspaper as carefully edited, hence perhaps reinforcing the impression that Germany would eventually win the war.¹³

The newspaper referred to the editorial staff but never offered names, whether to conceal the Germanic identity of most of its staff, or to protect the few French collaborators. The newspaper publishers attempted to recruit French journalists, most often with little success. Some French prisoners held in German camps agreed to write for the paper, such as sub-lieutenant Roger Hervé, who wrote three articles advocating French pacifism. In 1919, the French military sentenced him to death for treason, along with two others, for writing these articles, a sentence later lessened to twenty years forced labor.¹⁴ Prévot asked local commanders and municipal commissions to find potential journalists among the occupied people. Most Frenchmen refused, and the few that did write for the newspaper usually chose to write under pseudonyms. Interestingly, three reporters whose identities post-war authorities determined faced charges of gathering evidence for the enemy after the war.¹⁵

The Germans easily obtained the printing equipment needed to publish *La Gazette des Ardennes*: they confiscated it from the *Révil du Nord*.¹⁶ The German editors obtained paper first by requisitioning it from closed down French printers, and then through

¹¹ Jean-Paul Visse, "La Presse à Lille pendant la Grande Guerre: 2 – *La Gazette des Ardennes*, *Le Bruxellois* et quelque autres. *Journal de la Société des Amis de Panckoucke* 11 (April 2009): 6.

¹² Laska, 139.

¹³ *Journal des réfugiés du Nord*, September 9, 1916.

¹⁴ Laska, 146; Bellanger, Godechot, Guiral and Terrous, 3:444.

¹⁵ Laska, 142.

¹⁶ *Journal des réfugiés du Nord*, October 30, 1918.

membership in a German confederation for the distribution of printing paper.¹⁷ The look and frequency of publication of *La Gazette des Ardennes* changed during its lifespan. It started as a small newspaper, measuring 26cm by 36cm, but starting in April 1915, it changed to the “more French look” of 44cm by 56cm. *La Gazette* featured a four-column format until 1918, when it changed to six columns. From November 1914 until March 1915, the paper published only on Saturdays. In April 1915, publishers added a Wednesday edition. In October 1915, the paper started publishing on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. By April 1916, it became a four-day a week publication, adding Sundays to the rotation. Finally, in January 1918, the paper began publishing every day except Mondays. The publishers of *La Gazette des Ardennes* produced three different editions of the paper. There was the regular newspaper that went from once a week at its inception to six times a week by 1918, a weekly recap version containing the major articles of the past seven days, and an illustrated version.¹⁸ The illustrated version, offered a few times a month, was a beautiful publication, extravagantly illustrated with photographs of both shelled French villages and pristine German landscapes. Helen McPhail remarked that the underlying message was unstated but clear: Germany was clean and beautiful, while France was suffering at the hands of interfering allies.¹⁹ Propaganda distribution was the main purpose of the newspaper, but the Germans also expected it to make money. At first, it was not profitable, instead relying upon funding from Section IIIb. However, in 1916, it began restricting the number of free copies given

¹⁷ Laska, 137. Laska does not note the name of the confederation, but the largest one, supplying 85% of the paper within Germany, was Verband Deutscher Druckpapier-Fabriken.

¹⁸ This chapter cites the regular version of the newspaper unless otherwise noted.

¹⁹ McPhail, 125.

away and left lying around and later the paper added advertising. By 1917, the newspaper began showing a profit.²⁰

War News

Official communiqués were the single greatest source of war news in *La Gazette des Ardennes*. German communiqués offered a great quantity of detailed information; the question from occupied French point of view was simply could they be trusted. An example of a German communiqué from 1915 informed readers that en route to Saint-Julien-Ypres, the Germans continued their attack and progress, capturing three British officers, sixty soldiers, and one machine gun.²¹ This communiqué demonstrated the German propaganda technique of focusing upon details rather than the larger picture that was less flattering to them. This capturing of three British officers, sixty soldiers, and one machine gun was a small part of the Second Battle of Ypres, a significant offensive that occurred from April 22 until May 25, 1915. *La Gazette* reported the German successes of late April in late May, with detailed articles leaving out only one major detail: the German use of poisonous gas in the attacks. As battles such as this one lasted for weeks and caused tens of thousands of casualties on both sides, each side could find discreet victories within the larger campaign to focus upon. Another official bulletin in the same newspaper reported an earlier German success near Ypres on April 22, 1915, during which the Germans took 110 officers and 5,450 men prisoner.²² In general, coverage of fighting at Ypres was delayed but extensive. The German military aim was to flatten out the Ypres salient and cause serious setbacks for the Allies before the Germans transferred

²⁰ Laska, 136.

²¹ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, May 21, 1915.

²² Ibid.

a large number of their men to the Eastern Front for a planned Gorlice-Tarnow offensive against the Russians. While the above-mentioned two communiqués were accurate in terms of the scanty information they provided, they neglected to mention the Germans utilized poison gas to gain the advantage in fighting the Second Battle of Ypres. The Germans used commercial gas cylinders to release substantial amounts of deadly chlorine gas into the enemy's trenches.²³ On April 22, 1915, German troops near Ypres opened 6,000 cylinders and released 168 tons of chlorine gas, which wafted into French lines held by Algerian troops.²⁴ In avoiding the topic of gas, the editors of *La Gazette des Ardennes* did not have to share with its readers that the German army had violated the 1907 Hague Convention, which banned the use of asphyxiating gases.²⁵ As well, the editors of *La Gazette* also chose not to inform readers that this success surprised the Germans, who were not prepared for it, and lacked sufficient reserves to exploit the breakthrough the use of gas allowed.²⁶

French communiqués printed in *La Gazette* reported of successes or failures in a certain area in more general terms, usually without offering specifics. War bulletins at times simply read “nothing to report,” giving the impression that no information was omitted. All powers' communiqués contained no neutral language. Hence, both the authors of German and French bulletins referred to themselves as “us” or “we” and the other side as “the enemy.” The newspaper included French communiqués reporting lesser victories. For example, the May 24, 1915, issue reported that the French handed their

²³ Burg and Purcell, 57.

²⁴ Spencer Tucker, ed., *The Encyclopedia of World War I: A Political, Social, and Military History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 2: 679.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ William Griffiths and Thomas E. Griess. *The Great War* (Garden City Park, N.Y.: Square One Publishers, 2003), 68.

enemies a loss as they took several trenches in front of Iletsas.²⁷ On the surface, this communiqué seemed to report a relatively minor French victory. In fact, the taking of trenches near Iletsas occurred during the last days of the Second Battle of Ypres, after the Germans utilized gas. The French forces regrouped after the gas attacks to take these trenches, a truly significant event. Of course the editors of *La Gazette des Ardennes* never provided context to French victories, and could not have done so in this case without reporting the use of poison gas by the Germans.

In the March 15, 1915, issue, the newspaper included four pages devoted to the winter battle in Champagne. Remembered to history as the First Battle of Champagne, the battle was an allied offensive in the Champagne and Artois regions aimed at pushing back the vast pocket of German lines bulging into central France between Reims and Verdun. The editors of *La Gazette* relished General Joffre's lack of success as he attacked the area between Reims and Verdun. By all accounts, this battle, which lasted from December 20, 1914 until March 17, 1915, was a complete failure for the French. France gained only a few unimportant hamlets during this battle, but lost a great number of men.²⁸ Two pages worth of French communiqués demonstrated how French publicists focused upon small victories while ignoring the lack of major progress. As the French military and media also utilized censorship to contour news for the French home front, the editors of *La Gazette* placed French propaganda on display.

²⁷ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, May 24, 1915.

²⁸ John Terraine, *The Great War* (Hertfordshire, Eng.: Wordsworth 1997). Terraine states that some French authorities placed the number of French casualties as high as 240,000 men, most other sources place French losses at about half that number.

A report from autumn of that year noted that despite a violent counter-attack in Champagne, the French held their position.²⁹ This skirmish was part of the Second Battle of Champagne, which raged from September 25, 1915 until October 16, 1915. This battle General Joffre's planned "great attack" that aimed to exploit the numerical advantaged afforded the Allies by the German decision to concentrate their forces against the Russians in 1915 as the Allied forces outnumbered the Germans by eighteen divisions to seven divisions along the Champagne front.³⁰ The French aims were to rupture the German front, severing their supply lines around Attigny and Douai, and thereby forcing a German withdrawal from the Noyon salient and provide relief to the hard-pressed Russians as the Germans moved troops back to the Western Front to respond.³¹ The French did secure a small salient against the German Third Army at Perthes Woods and British troops pushed the Germans back to secondary positions east of Loos. However, these small gains came at the cost of huge British and French losses in terms of men, and as the fighting continued and German reserves began to reach the battle, the French offensive stalled.³² The offensive gained approximately fifteen square miles, penetrating two and a half miles into German-held territories at some points. This advance cost 144,000 French casualties, with the Germans sustaining 85,000 casualties.³³ Almost a month before that French communiqué appearing in the newspaper, *La Gazette des Ardennes* featured a front-page map of the Second Battle of Champagne, demonstrating French and British gains and losses. A crude, hand-drawn map, correctly demonstrated the area gained by the French, but the note underneath made it clear the true cost of

²⁹ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, November 5, 1915.

³⁰ Burg and Purcell, 83.

³¹ Tucker, Wood, and Murphy, 78.

³² Spencer Tucker, *The Great War, 1914-1918*. (Bloomington, IND: Indiana University Press, 1998), 67.

³³ *Ibid.*

gaining that land. The editors reported that by September 30, 1915, the French had gained twenty-four kilometers of land, but at a cost of 100,000 soldiers lives.³⁴ French casualties at Champagne in September and October 1915 reached 143,000.³⁵ In this instance, the news for the French was bad enough that the editors of *La Gazette des Ardennes* could simply report the truth and expect that without embellishment it was enough to demoralize people in the occupied zone.

As in the coverage of the Second Battle of Champagne, French communiqués were frequently a few days older than German ones, and they were not exact replicas of what the French military emitted. The publishers claimed that they wanted to print French and German communiqués from the same day alongside each other, but the French communiqués arrived too late, hence they used translated neutral communiqués, but even those could only be published a few days later.³⁶

Coverage of the Verdun fighting began in late February 1916. Extensive reporting ran from mid-March 1916 through the first week of April. At least four issues included coverage beyond war bulletins in another article entitled, “War Happenings: Around Verdun.”³⁷ This early coverage focused upon the success of the German attack against the western face of the salient. As German efforts petered out towards the end of June, so did *La Gazette des Ardennes*’s coverage. As Andreas Laksa notes, the last few references to Verdun could only focus upon failed French attacks, rather than proclaim German success.³⁸ Readers of *La Gazette* learned of early German successes, but not how

³⁴ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, October 13, 1915.

³⁵ Holger H. Herwig, “War in the West, 1914-16” in *A Companion to World War I*, John Horne, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing: 2010), 56.

³⁶ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, January 18, 1915.

³⁷ “Faits de Guerre: Autour de Verdun.” *La Gazette des Ardennes*, March 15, 1916; March 17, 1916; March 19, 1916; March 22, 1916.

³⁸ Laska, 164.

at the end of the slaughter, the battle lines were close to their starting point.³⁹ No mention appeared in the newspaper explaining how the French forces held their own because General Pétain made improvements for conditions of the troops, which rallied French morale. The number of French soldiers killed made the pages of the newspaper. However, the fact that during this battle, which historian William Martin notes has come to represent an act of European fratricide, an almost equal number of Germans died or went missing did not.⁴⁰

Not surprisingly, the other great battle of 1916- the Somme – received less coverage than Verdun (Verdun began as a German offensive, the Somme was a British and French offensive).⁴¹ Indeed, the within the pages of *La Gazette* it was always referred to as “the great allied offensive.” Coverage focused upon the brutality and aggressiveness of the British (and at times French). Treatment of other battles usually included a tally of area and prisoners taken, deaths and injuries. Somme coverage provided little of this, interestingly, considering that the Allies casualty rate was high, with 90,000 Frenchmen killed or wounded during the first month of fighting alone.⁴² More than a month before the Somme battles ended in November 1916, coverage all but disappeared. In describing all media coverage of the Somme, historian Martin Gilbert demonstrates that reporting in *La Gazette des Ardennes* was not out of line with other areas. He writes that the detail of the agony and misery were to a great degree withheld from the public everywhere and

³⁹ Neil M. Heyman, *World War I* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1997), 20.

⁴⁰ William Martin, *Verdun 1916: They Shall not Pass* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2001). Heyman states that nearly 400,000 French lost their lives at Verdun and 340,000 Germans were either killed or missing during the battle. The classic reference work for information on Verdun is Alistair Horne, *The Price of Glory* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).

⁴¹ Historians somewhat overlook the French role at the Somme. Despite Verdun, they committed almost as many men as the British to the offensive.

⁴² Martin Gilbert, *The Somme: Heroism and Horror in the First World War* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006), 20. The definitive study of the Battle of the Somme is now William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).

when it was reported, “Every bloody encounter was portrayed as a victory, every terrified combatant as a hero...”⁴³

The editors delayed providing news of the German offensive of March 21, 1918, because the newspaper’s controllers wanted to present it as a *fait accompli*, with coverage beginning March 28, 1918.⁴⁴ Coverage of the offensive (when it was going well for the Germans) included detailed maps and data about prisoners taken. While historians would later claim the Second Battle of the Marne turned the tide of war as initiative was wrested from the Germans, newspaper coverage focused again upon specific German successes, blurring the truth of the larger picture.⁴⁵

Eastern Front coverage was extensive. Until the Russian exit from the war, its military failures were fodder for the *Gazette*. In particular, it frequently reported the large number of Russian prisoners taken.⁴⁶ On a few occasions, *La Gazette* provided graphs to illustrate German successes on the Western Front. One map, superimposed with a bar graph, compared the square miles of enemy territory conquered by each warring nation. The amount of German soil held by France was insignificant compared to French and Belgian land held by the Germans.⁴⁷ Another chart, this time accompanied by drawings, visually declared the portion of French industry in German hands, which included 90% of the country’s iron, 85.7% of its brute steel, and 43% of its total industry.⁴⁸ *La Gazette des Ardennes* also provided information that was not news, but useful to understanding the war. Towards the end of 1915, it began offering detailed maps, such as a relief map of

⁴³ Gilbert, xix. For more information on the Battle of the Somme, see also Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The Somme* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁴⁴ Laska, 173.

⁴⁵ R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History from 3500 B.C. to the present* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 980.

⁴⁶ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, June 4, 1915.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, August 26, 1915.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, October 31, 1915.

southern Serbia, which would help readers understand key elements of the war.⁴⁹ Such information was relevant but smacked of propaganda due to the selection of maps. The relief map of southern Serbia is case in point as the newspaper editors published it within a month of Bulgaria joining the Central Powers attack on Serbia on October 11, 1915. At the outbreak of the war, the Bulgarian government declared neutrality and both sides offered it incentives to join the war on their sides, as Bulgaria's army was a sizable force and the country occupied a strategic position in the Balkans.⁵⁰ By the summer of 1915, it appeared that Germany was in the stronger military position, and King Ferdinand and Premier Radoslavov of Bulgaria decided to enter the war on Germany's side.⁵¹ When Bulgaria entered the war, many assumed it meant that Germany would win the war within months. The map was a complementary piece to several articles lauding Bulgaria's entry into the war on Germany's side, which many saw as a major foreign policy failure for France and a coup for Germany.⁵² *La Gazette* also published maps whose potential for bias lay within the information included and excluded, especially during the last year of the war. These maps were often of German offensives, showing German gains at their height and not juxtaposed against maps of French gains.⁵³

Lists of captured, injured, and dead French soldiers permeated *La Gazette des Ardennes* and the newspaper's staff utilized them as powerful propaganda. The newspaper editors presented these lists as information that the French government was withholding from its people, information that the German government shared because it

⁴⁹ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, November 12, 1915.

⁵⁰ R.J. Crampton, *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 64.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 65. This choice was not surprising; despite Bulgaria's original position of neutrality, it had taken a large loan from the German government in 1914.

⁵² *La Gazette des Ardennes*, September 28, 1915, October 17, 1915, October 27, 1915, November 17, 1915, and November 19, 1915. These issues are only examples of the type of coverage provided about Bulgaria.

⁵³ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, May 22, 1918; June 15, 1918; July 7, 1918.

understood the hardship of civilians who did not know if a loved one was injured, captured, or even alive.⁵⁴ The paper claimed it was “French vanity” that would not allow the French government to admit it had lost 250,000 soldiers as German POWs.⁵⁵ While this statement inaccurately depicted the French government’s actions as unusually deceitful – all the warring nations treated prisoner of war numbers as confidential information – the 250,000 French prisoner of war number appears very close to accurate, as by early 1915 the Germans held 245,000 French prisoners.⁵⁶ Journalists in one issue accused France of literally trying to hide the large number of the injured – both in terms of reporting them and allowing them to receive treatment in the normal military medical system.⁵⁷ The French military had faced criticism of their care for wounded soldiers before, from no less a source than the country’s future leader. Senator Georges Clemenceau disparaged the shortcomings of the French military medical system in the newspaper he edited (*l’Homme enchaîné*) after he observed injured soldiers left untreated on a railroad train.⁵⁸ However, it was during the war that the French army developed the triage system of casualty clearance that is still the basis for the treatment of wounded in military and disaster situations today, leading to vast improvements in survival rates as compared to the Crimean War.⁵⁹ Leaders in both countries deemed such news about prisoners of war and wounded soldiers damaging to home morale, hence German newspapers did not print such information about German soldiers. By including such information in the *Gazette*, its editors could claim to be providing a service, while at the

⁵⁴ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, January 8, 1915.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, April 2, 1915.

⁵⁶ Priscilla Mary Roberts and Spencer Tucker, eds., *World War One: A Student Encyclopedia* (Santa-Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006) 3: 1462.

⁵⁷ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, May 10, 1915.

⁵⁸ Heyman, 131.

⁵⁹ Theodore H. Tulchinsky and Elena Varavilcova, *The New Public Health*, 2nd Ed. (Burlington, MN: Elsevier Academic Press, 2009), 22.

same time inserting demoralizing information. The newspaper's circulation increased dramatically when it began printing the names of French prisoners of war and their locations.⁶⁰ The *Gazette* printed over 500 lists of captured French soldiers' names, supplemented by other lists, such as "French soldiers killed at Gallipoli," and "French killed by friendly fire."⁶¹ Extremely painful for readers, these lists proved unreliable at times. As Deborah Buffton notes, many a reader found a relative's name on the prisoner of war or dead list, only to find out later he was alive and free.⁶² If editors sought to shape French opinion with casualty lists, they had the same goal in their news of the sea war.

German pride in their submarine capabilities revealed itself almost daily in the pages of *La Gazette des Ardennes*. The author of one article examined the morality of submarine warfare; unsurprisingly he concluded that submarine attacks were indeed a valid form of warfare.⁶³ At first most submarine news came under the sub-section, "Diverse News," but by 1917 a sub-section devoted entirely to submarine action became a frequent feature. Its author told proudly of German submarine activity around Liverpool and even off the coast of North America.⁶⁴ Monthly recaps tallied German submarine successes. For example, the June 26, 1918, issue noted that in the month of May German subs sank 614,000 tons of Entente ships.⁶⁵ This number was most likely an exaggeration, harking back to the apex of submarine success in April 1917. During that month, German submarines destroyed 155 British vessels, equaling 516,394 tons, with mines

⁶⁰ Buffton, 9.

⁶¹ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, March 19, 1916; September 9, 1915; November 3, 1915.

⁶² Buffton, 113.

⁶³ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, March 5, 1917.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, February 8, 1915; June 9, 1918.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, June 26, 1918.

sinking fourteen ships equaling 28,888 tons.⁶⁶ The editors of *La Gazette* proclaimed with satisfaction that German submarines destroyed enough tonnage carrying supplies to affect the English bread supply.⁶⁷ This was not hyperbole; Britain came within six weeks of starvation. The United States Ambassador to Britain, Walter Page, commenting on the German submarine attacks on the British food supply, stated, “what we are witnessing is the defeat of Britain.”⁶⁸ However, Allied shipping losses fell dramatically by the end of 1917 and continued to fall during 1918, making this statement outdated and no longer true. A fall in Allied shipping losses and higher submarine losses were a direct result of the Allies adopting a convoy system of grouping ships together, which offered great protection as escorts could counter-attack against submarines.⁶⁹ *La Gazette des Ardennes*’ coverage of submarine action did not reflect this decline in its success, as the newspaper’s editors were still reporting submarine attacks as late as September 18, 1918.⁷⁰

Zeppelin attacks were also a popular focus of *La Gazette des Ardennes*. Readers read up-to-date reports of aerial attacks on both London and Paris.⁷¹ Most of the coverage of zeppelin raids occurred in February through April 1916, with one article noting current British defense systems could not curtail zeppelins.⁷² The fifty-one German zeppelin raids on England did instill fear in the British civilian population, killing 1400 people,

⁶⁶ R.H. Gibson and Maurice Pandergast, *The German Submarine War, 1914-1918* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 160. In April 1917 a total of 881,000 tons of the world’s shipping was lost, but that number includes some Entente powers’ ships.

⁶⁷ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, May 16, 1918.

⁶⁸ Gibson and Pandergast, 159.

⁶⁹ Michael Gunton, *Submarines at War: A History of the Undersea Warfare from the American Revolution to the Cold War* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2003), 36.

⁷⁰ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, September 18, 1918.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, February 4, 1916; June 16, 1917.

⁷² *Ibid.*, April 9, 1916.

and wounding 5000 more.⁷³ While the British defense system was unable at first to deal with the air raids, it quickly developed effective anti-aircraft defenses, including incendiary bullets that rendered zeppelin raids ineffective and expensive.⁷⁴ Not surprisingly, the editors of *La Gazette* chose not to report the waning success of zeppelin raids, but mention of zeppelin attacks did taper off, as opposed to submarine coverage. Such regular reports of submarine and zeppelin attacks would do little to ingratiate the Germans to the French in the occupied zone, but surely aimed to propagate the message that Germany would win the war.

News about Unoccupied France

La Gazette des Ardennes contained news from unoccupied France in most issues, frequently under a section entitled, "French News." This is somewhat surprising since the Germans endeavored to isolate occupied France and create in it a sense of separateness from the rest of France.⁷⁵ However, some of the news reported followed this agenda of making unoccupied France, particularly Paris, seem alien. One article entitled, "A Parisian Night," depicted Parisian society, especially its upper echelons, as treating war like an abstraction.⁷⁶ While at a grand party, guests lament the tragedy of war while supping on fine food and drinking wine. The editors in including such a scene clearly aimed to raise the ire of those suffering in occupied France.

⁷³ Spencer Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of World War I: A Political, Social, and Military History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 2:709. For insight into the emotional response from the British home front to zeppelin attacks, see Ariela Freedom, "Zeppelin Fictions and the British Home Front," *Journal of Modern Literature* 27.3 (Winter 2004): 47-62.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 709. Zeppelin raids could be seen as a moderately successful from a tactical perspective as they kept close to a half million British troops in Britain to defend against them. Guillaume de Syon, *Zeppelin! Germany and the Airship, 1900-1939* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 131.

⁷⁵ Buffton, 56.

⁷⁶ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, March 24, 1916.

Not surprisingly, most of the news coming out of unoccupied France printed in *La Gazette des Ardennes* was bad. Short blurbs of bad news often appeared in the paper, such as one about a fire ravaging the Moulin Rouge, and another about Crédit Lyonnais lowering its dividends.⁷⁷ The newspaper also included several articles proclaiming France in the clutches of various calamities. One alleged that a population crisis stemming from low marriage and birthrates was exacerbated by the loss of life on the battlefield, and was leading France down the dangerous road to depopulation.⁷⁸ Coupled with the additional loss of population in occupied territory, one article declared the French race in crisis.⁷⁹ According to the paper, France was also in the middle of an agricultural crisis and a transportation crisis.⁸⁰ The editors of *La Gazette* blamed the agricultural crisis on the French government not setting regulations for either food production or consumption. Indeed, the editors of *La Gazette* were relatively accurate in this long article, with the propaganda element being the claims of German governmental success in regulating food. The French government hesitated in enacting controls over prices and supplies, and this combined with German occupation of some of the most productive farmland, did leave the country unprepared for the long conflict.⁸¹ The article did not mention that the French populace was not facing starvation; the French government instead purchased large quantities of cereals from foreign markets to deal

⁷⁷ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, March 8, 1915; April 16, 1915. The Moulin Rouge article appeared in the newspaper's March 8, 1915 issue; the fire took place February 27, 1915. This sort of delay was frequently the norm in reporting news from unoccupied France. As well, the "story" about the Moulin Rouge fire was only one-sentence long, surely leaving readers with a great number of unanswered questions.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, November 21, 1915; June 26, 1917; April 16, 1916.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, May 4, 1918.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, March 19, 1916; April 9, 1916.

⁸¹ Adam D. Sheingate, *The Rise of the Agricultural Welfare State: Institutions and Interest Group Power in the United States, France, and Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 91.

with the deficits.⁸² A lack of carts and wagons to move merchandise unloaded from ships and resultant backlog at French docks was the transportation crisis discussed in the pages of *La Gazette*. The German-controlled newspaper cited an article by Marcel Cachin (a SFIO member, elected to the Chamber of Deputies, who rallied to the war cause) as its source. While getting goods off the docks was a legitimate problem for the French government, the story also demonstrated that goods were still flowing into France, and French censors allowed a domestic newspaper to publish the article from which the editors of *La Gazette* lifted the piece.

Of all the crises, it was coverage of the economic crisis in unoccupied France that received the most newspaper space. In late 1915 and early 1916 the newspaper began reporting how expensive life was in France; by mid-1917 it was declaring France as unable to escape an economic crisis.⁸³ Life indeed had become more vastly more expensive; the cost of living in Paris increased approximately 300 percent between 1914 and 1918.⁸⁴ There is no question that the war represented a huge shock to the French economy. However, the timing of *La Gazette's* article about an economic crisis seems off. France's GDP decreased sharply, but then it stabilized at a slightly higher level in 1916 and 1917, suggesting the economy was finding a new war-time equilibrium.⁸⁵ Overall, people in Paris were pessimistic and nervous, *La Gazette* told readers.⁸⁶ Parisians' greatest concern was the economic situation, even more so than the actual war. However, Jean-Jacques Becker suggests that they were more concerned with the cost of

⁸² Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of World War I*, 2:438.

⁸³ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, December 15, 1915; January 7, 1916; March 17, 1916; June 3, 1917.

⁸⁴ Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of World War I*, 2:438.

⁸⁵ Pierre-Cyrille Hautcoeur, "Was the Great War a Watershed? The Economics of World War I in France," *The Economics of World War I*, Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 170.

⁸⁶ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, January 29, 1915.

living than battles because of their supreme confidence that France was on the correct side and would ultimately defeat Germany and its partners.⁸⁷ While most of the facts stated in these reports resembled the truth, the extent to which they were belabored, and the exclusion of almost all positive news out of the rest of France created an exaggeratedly gloomy caricature of unoccupied France's well-being.

France's political difficulties also received keen attention in the newspaper. Political scandals, such as the Desclaux Affair, were great fodder for *La Gazette des Ardennes* to prove how poorly things were going in the rest of France.⁸⁸ The Desclaux graft case was the perfect propaganda story for *La Gazette*. In January 1915, the French government accused Colonel François Desclaux, a member of the Radical-Socialist government and former chief secretary to Finance Minister Joseph Caillaux, of stealing army supplies, and he received a sentence of seven years solitary confinement.⁸⁹ Despite the *Union sacrée*, military leaders at times accused the Radical-Socialist party of being defeatists, and the French media suggested that the Desclaux case smacked of treason as it undermined the military. *La Gazette* utilized the story to demonstrate that not everyone in unoccupied France believed France could win the war.

No less than five substantial articles celebrated Declassé's (a man known for his anti-German sentiments) resignation.⁹⁰ Théophile Declassé served in Viviani's ministry as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Declassé helped convince Italy to enter the war on the side of the Allies, gaining him infamy in Germany. A former ambassador to Russia, he

⁸⁷ Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People* (Providence: Berg Publishers, 1993), 132-137.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, April 2, 1915.

⁸⁹ Frank Moore Colby, Allen Leon Churchill, Herbert Treadwell Wade, and Frank H. Vizetelly, *The New International Yearbook: A Compendium of the World's Progress* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1916), 235.

⁹⁰ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, October 17, 1915; October 20, 1915; October 24, 1915; November 7, 1915; November 17, 1915.

supported Russian annexation of Constantinople and the Straits, which greatly undermined any chance of Bulgaria entered the war on France's side. Declassé's foreign policy failure led to his resignation, which he offered on October 12, 1915, after Entente forces entered Salonika.⁹¹ The writers of the articles in *La Gazette* wrote that they did not want to discuss the internal politics of belligerent countries, but that the Declassé case demonstrated that dissension within French leadership.⁹²

Another political scandal the paper covered, this time in three long articles, including one entitled, "The Mistake," was the French government's refusal to issue passports to French socialists wishing to attend the Stockholm Conference.⁹³ *La Gazette* utilized yet another story, the vilification and arrest of Malvy to cast the French government as authoritarian and to demonstrate internal dissension within the French leadership as defeatism grew.⁹⁴ Starting in 1914, Georges Clemenceau began criticizing Louis-Jean Malvy, Minister of the Interior, for laxity towards defeatism. Despite these protests, Malvy remained in position until August 31, 1917. In the winter of that year, Commander-in-Chief Robert Nivelle advised Malvy to take action against antiwar activity on the home front. Many military officers, conservative newspapermen, and government officials blamed Malvy for the disastrous spring offensive, citing internal defeatists as the cause.⁹⁵ Clemenceau criticized Malvy for having left unfettered the publication of the pro-German newspaper, *Le Bonnet Rouge* while being unduly influenced by its editor, Almereyda. A nine-month trial by the Senate dismissed treason charges against Malvy but found him guilty of negligence and banished him from France

⁹¹ Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of World War I*, 1:347.

⁹² *La Gazette des Ardennes*, October 24, 1915.

⁹³ "La Gaffe," *La Gazette des Ardennes*, June 5, 1917; June 7, 1917; June 12, 1917.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, August 23, 1918; May 18, 1918.

⁹⁵ Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of World War I*, 3:741.

for five years.⁹⁶ In May 1918, *La Gazette*'s editors furthered pushed the concept that the French government was trying to silence any voices questioning the French war effort in its coverage of the *Bonnet Rouge* trials. The *Bonnet Rouge* was a socialist and Germanophile newspaper in France, which the government shut down in 1917, and whose directors faced trial for treason after its editor committed suicide in jail. During the trial, one witness testified to the similarity between the policy pursued by the *Bonnet Rouge* and that of the *Gazette des Ardennes*.⁹⁷ It was found that the newspaper leaders were in the pay of the Germans and those left received sentences of five years hard labor.⁹⁸ *La Gazette des Ardennes*'s reporters, while relaying in great detail the facts of the trial, made the defendants appear sympathetic, and stressed that the French government silenced the newspaper for promoting peace and having differing views from the government.⁹⁹

In case all this horrible news coming out of Paris was not to enough to alienate readers from the rest of their country, *La Gazette des Ardennes* reported to them that those evacuated from the occupied zone received poor treatment once they reached unoccupied France.¹⁰⁰ Sadly, this statement was true in many cases, as civilians in unoccupied France discriminated against refugees repatriated from the Nord, whom they saw as taking jobs from locals (despite a labor shortage), and called "Huns from the

⁹⁶ Ibid., 741. Malvy was the most prominent politician charged with Joseph Caillaux. Caillaux met with German agents to attempt to negotiate a peace. The Senate tried him for treason in 1920, and while he was acquitted of that charge, he was deprived of his civic rights for five years on a lesser charge. Because his trial was after the war ended, *La Gazette des Ardennes* touched upon Caillaux's situation infrequently.

⁹⁷ *The New York Times*, May 6, 1918. Two years after the end of the war Louis Marchand wrote a book demonstrating the similarity between articles in *La Gazette des Ardennes* and the *Bonnet Rouge*. Louis Marchand, *L'offensive morale des Allemands en France pendant la Guerre: L'assaut de l'âme française* (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1920).

⁹⁸ Paul Jankowski, *Shades of Indignation: Political Scandals in France, Past and Present* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 187.

⁹⁹ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, May 18, 1918; May 19, 1918; May 22, 1918; May 23, 1918; May 24, 1918.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., May 31, 1915.

Nord.”¹⁰¹ The newspaper informed readers that their suffering was not for some humanitarian cause, but France’s uncontrollable desire for revenge and regaining Alsace-Lorraine.¹⁰² *La Gazette* even provided a few editorial pieces delving into what it meant to be French; of course, its editors’ answers were never ones to fill a French patriot’s heart with joy. In “Is France Democratic,” and “The Balance Sheet of Republicanism and Parliamentism,” *La Gazette des Ardennes* described France as flawed to its very core.¹⁰³

A Negative View of Other Allies

Almost all news about France’s allies beyond that contained in communiqués constituted propaganda aimed at demonstrating Allied problems or exploring the malice of their military and government authorities. *La Gazette des Ardennes*’ editors fed readers a constant diet of anti-British propaganda. They wrote that if they were in control of the war, they would seek peace with France while continuing the war with their true enemy, Britain.¹⁰⁴ The propaganda against Britain was not of the subtle kind that would be difficult to distinguish. The newspaper frequently insinuated that Britain wanted to annex Calais. The editors noted that before writing about the British desire to commandeer Calais they reflected for a long time, fearing that readers would believe they were trying to create hatred among the French for the British.¹⁰⁵ By June 1915, the editors appeared to have lost all qualms about creating such fears. In an article entitled, “France the day after the war,” they reported that during the next winter campaign England planned to

¹⁰¹ Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau, and Becker, 50.

¹⁰² *La Gazette des Ardennes*, October 22, 1917.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, February 21, 1915; May 26, 1918.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, February 15, 1915.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, February 22, 1915.

take Calais, Boulogne, and Dunkerque with plans of keeping these areas after the war.¹⁰⁶ In other articles editors claimed that England was conserving its forces, in order to fight to the last Frenchman.¹⁰⁷ This last statement touches upon the very essence of good propaganda, as it takes a grain of truth and grossly distorts its meaning to Germany's advantage. The small British professional army, comprised of 160,000 soldiers, was devastated by fighting in the early months of the war.¹⁰⁸ By the end of 1914, voluntary enlistments meant that half a million men were undergoing training to fight, but there was a delay due to that training during which the French bore the major burden of the war in terms of manpower. This concept of the British fighting to the last Frenchmen was so powerful that the Germans would reutilize this exact phrase again during the Second World War.¹⁰⁹

During the four years of its publication, *La Gazette des Ardennes'* editors "educated" readers on the long-term enmity that had existed between England and France. The newspaper included reports on long-resolved disputes, including the incident at Fashoda and Anglo-French antagonism in the Orient.¹¹⁰ It harked back to battles over Louisiana, Canada, the Indies, and Egypt to demonstrate that the two countries were historic enemies. Editors advised readers that Britain duped France into believing it was acting out of idealism in fighting the current war while power and colonial annexation were its only true concerns.¹¹¹ The paper frequently cited England's woes with Ireland to demonstrate the British lust for territory and its repercussions. From March 1916 until

¹⁰⁶ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, June 27, 1915.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, August 29, 1915.

¹⁰⁸ Martin Gilbert, *The Somme: Heroes and Horror in the First World War* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), 3.

¹⁰⁹ Randal Marlin, *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2002), 18.

¹¹⁰ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, November 17, 1915; July 10, 1918.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, July 2, 1917; August 27, 1918; August 28, 1918.

July 1918, several articles detailed unrest in Ireland and that country's desire to break away from British control. By July 1918, the newspaper declared Ireland a crisis.¹¹² The British Parliament had enacted the Irish Home Rule bill in September 1914, hoping to make Ireland a non-issue during the war. However, Ulster Unionists and British conservatives secured the concurrent suspension of the bill for the duration of the war. Ireland, without ever facing conscription, contributed 200,000 troops to the British military.¹¹³ However, during the second half of the war anger with the suspension of Home Rule led to such great dissent – which quite frequently turned violent, such as with the Easter Rising of nationalists in 1916 – that British troops had to be garrisoned in Ireland to keep the peace. *La Gazette*'s editors provided a fairly accurate overview of the situation in Ireland, giving the impression that the once mighty Britain now faced serious problems on every front, and all its own doing.¹¹⁴ One editorial explained what the world truly needed was continental solidarity against “the island.”¹¹⁵

La Gazette des Ardennes referenced both Russia and the United States. Andreas Laska notes that until Russia signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, *La Gazette des Ardennes* paid little heed to it.¹¹⁶ The few references made were to the horrible conditions in the mammoth country. The paper reported on its financial woes, its authoritarian government, its ministerial crisis, and the poor quality of life in St. Petersburg.¹¹⁷ The ministerial crisis generated particularly interesting coverage, as it utilized Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov's pending dismissal to demonstrate the cost of Russia and

¹¹² Ibid., July 6, 1918.

¹¹³ Roberts and Tucker, 4:931.

¹¹⁴ For more on Ireland's multifarious reactions to World War I and Ireland's relationship with England during the war, see Keith Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹¹⁵ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, August 12, 1915.

¹¹⁶ Laska, 169.

¹¹⁷ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, January 25, 1915; February 12, 1915; November 5, 1915.

France's poor choices in the Balkans.¹¹⁸ The article compared him to Declassé, and the page with the article just happened to also carry a map of Serbia. The article was a tad premature however, as his actual dismissal only took place seven months later when he angered the Tsarina by asking the Tsar to consider Polish independence after the war. *La Gazette* also covered the Russian revolution, with at least four articles carrying the title, "Russian crisis."¹¹⁹ Editors accused the Allies of having not supported the obviously just Russian Revolution.¹²⁰

The American coverage in *La Gazette des Ardennes* changed dramatically after the United States entered the war on the Allied side. While the newspaper did not attempt to create animosity in its readers toward the United States, it did alter its opinion of the country. Prior to its entrance into the war, the staff of *La Gazette des Ardennes* portrayed the United States as a wise neutral, sometimes featuring articles by pro-German Americans.¹²¹ Before the United States entered the war, it was a country deserving of respect; afterward it simply became a capitalist machine concerned only with continuing to sell its steel to the England.¹²² America, the powerful up-and-coming force, became the "American mirage" in the pages of the newspaper.¹²³ The paper reported American military failures. Interestingly, the paper did not exploit the friction that existed between the Allies and the United States, as much to the chagrin of the French and British leaders, the United States insisted on maintaining a separate force on the battlefield, and refused to simply be a replacement reservoir for the Allied armies.

¹¹⁸ In the November 5, 1915 issue, *La Gazette* spells his last name Sasonow.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., March 26, 1917; May 26, 1917; May 27, 1917; June 3, 1917.

¹²⁰ Ibid., May 28, 1917.

¹²¹ Ibid., May 21, 1915.

¹²² Ibid., April 16, 1917.

¹²³ Ibid., July 18, 1918.

La Gazette des Ardennes frequently focused upon what it deemed the Allies' unchivalrous wartime conduct. It claimed the French mistreated prisoners of war deported to Africa.¹²⁴ The paper also accused the French government of officially lying when it publicly stated that Germany sold war booty.¹²⁵ In editorials, the paper accused the British of even more heinous actions. Claims of unacceptable British behavior included allegations that the English violated Swedish neutrality by boarding one of their ships without warning, and that an English naval ship sunk an innocent German fishing boat.¹²⁶ *La Gazette* characterized the British as hypocritical in their anger over the execution of Miss Cavell, as they had executed females purported to be German spies.¹²⁷ This claim is an interesting one, as history only famously remembers the French execution of Mata Hari.¹²⁸ On April 2, 1916, the paper made its most outrageous claim when it published the charge that the British were trying to exterminate the German people. The article stated that an American citizen claimed Winston Churchill stated that the aim of the war was to exterminate the German people, which would happen within months because "German manhood is rapidly disappearing."¹²⁹ The unnamed source continued on to state that Churchill believed the German people would cease to exist because most the men of martial age would have been killed in battle. People in France, Germany, and Great Britain feared what such a huge loss of young men would mean to their countries' future population growth. This story implied the major battles, which cost

¹²⁴ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, June 20, 1915.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, November 26, 1915.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, March 12, 1915; April 15, 1915.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, November 5, 1915.

¹²⁸ These German claims cannot be completely dismissed however. Philip Knightley in *The First Casualty*, 86, writes, "The French had already shot on woman for exactly the same offence [as Edith Cavell] and were to shoot another eight for other capital offences before the end of the war." Unfortunately, Knightley does not provide a source for this statement.

¹²⁹ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, April 2, 1916. This quote appeared in *La Gazette des Ardennes* in English.

hundreds of thousands of lives, were not for some greater victory, but part of an evil British plan.

Obsession with the Parisian Press

The editors of *La Gazette des Ardennes* obsessed over the French press publishing false news about the German occupation, a fact that reveals itself in most issues of the newspaper. This fixation must have appeared all the more surreal to its readership considering *La Gazette*'s relationship with the truth. *La Gazette* claimed the Parisian press was trying to turn the world against Germany by printing lies, then distributing its papers abroad or sharing articles with other newspapers in other countries.¹³⁰ Almost all the accusations thrown at the Parisian press in the paper were variations on a theme: you tell lies. The paper described the situation as, "it is not the French people, but the press, that tells these lies that are both malicious and ridiculous at the same time, lies that the population of the German occupied provinces must recognize as such."¹³¹ The paper admitted that the Parisian press's job included cultivating patriotism amongst its readers, but that the animosity it spewed crossed the line to lies.¹³² It declared that the French press simply followed the official orders of the government and military without any legitimate concern for the public.¹³³ The result was "Brainwashing, A French Specialty."¹³⁴ It appeared that *La Gazette* attempted to create contempt for the intellectual caste in unoccupied France, in particular for newspaper editors and journalists. Indeed,

¹³⁰ Ibid., January 8, 1915.

¹³¹ "Ce n'est pas le peuple français, c'est plutôt la presse, qui émet des mensonges, méchants et ridicules à la fois, mensonges qui la population des provinces occupées par les Allemands est obligée de reconnaître comme tel." Ibid., February 26, 1915.

¹³² Ibid., March 8, 1915; March 12, 1915.

¹³³ Ibid., June 9, 1918.

¹³⁴ "Le bourrage de crânes, spécialité français." Ibid., June 9, 1917.

the author of the article noted that one could not judge the French people from its press.¹³⁵ French soldiers lamenting the war were one of the few French sources that could be trusted, according to the paper.¹³⁶ Of course, one could only trust soldiers' writings found in *La Gazette* (which were usually written by prisoners of war trying to garner better treatment) because the French media faked soldiers' letters.¹³⁷ Sometimes the writers of *La Gazette* hurled accusations at specific newspapers- frequently the *Petit Parisien* - other times their scorn extended to all papers in unoccupied France, not just those published in the capital.¹³⁸

Specific points on which the *La Gazette des Ardennes* took issue with the French press included what its editors saw as the false reporting of a widespread famine in Germany. *La Gazette's* editors may have disagreed with French accounts of food supplies in Germany, but in general, they were accurate. The British blockade led to a twenty-five percent decline in domestic agricultural production and thus to serious shortages in the food supply, and the undernourishment of the German population.¹³⁹ In the turnip winter" of 1916-1917, when German diets relied on turnips to take the place of potatoes and bread, food shortages led to increased infant mortality and stunted growth in children.¹⁴⁰ *La Gazette's* editors were also furious with accusations that the Germans were committing atrocities, including stealing artistic treasures from occupied zones.¹⁴¹ In general terms, the paper claimed that the French press consistently lessened the importance of enemy successes, hence not providing people with an accurate description

¹³⁵ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, October 15, 1915.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, January 22, 1915.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, April 16, 1915.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, January 15, 1915.

¹³⁹ Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of World War I*, 2:477.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 478-9.

¹⁴¹ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, May 10, 1915; April 12, 1916; May 24, 1915; May 21, 1917.

of the war.¹⁴² This disdain for the French press did not stop *La Gazette des Ardennes* from printing blurbs from it in almost every issue under the headings “In France” and “Mirror on the French Press.” The snippets chosen, however, always focused upon negative news for the French, or were edited to appear that way. While the Parisian press was *La Gazette des Ardennes*’ focus, the paper’s staff also lambasted other countries’ media at times. For example, the paper explained that before the occupation, the Belgian press created fear amongst its populace, causing them to flee their homes, leading to greater hardship early during the occupation.¹⁴³

Positive News about Germany

La Gazette des Ardennes literally had a captive audience. While it was highly unlikely that readers in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing were going to become Germanophiles, the newspaper attempted to convince them that Germans were not all that bad. In doing so, the newspaper’s editors sometimes rewrote history. One article contended that Germans were not a militaristic people; for example, imperial France forced the war of 1870-1871 upon Germany, rather than Germany wanting war.¹⁴⁴ Laska notes that the paper portrayed German soldiers not as barbarians, but mobilized students.¹⁴⁵ The paper also attempted to demonstrate German circumspection and thoughtfulness when it came to war. In editorials such as “Militarism,” and “An

¹⁴² *La Gazette des Ardennes*, February 2, 1915.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, December 27, 1914.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, April 15, 1915.

¹⁴⁵ Laska, 178.

Examination of Consciousness,” the paper revealed that while the Germans were certain of their righteousness, they too hated the effects of war.¹⁴⁶

The Germany described in *La Gazette* was militarily strong. One report noted that German lines on the Eastern Front were impregnable, while another showed the German occupation of Warsaw.¹⁴⁷ *La Gazette* printed in their entirety at least six speeches by the Chancellor to the Reichstag, allowing readers to feel the full force of German nationalism.¹⁴⁸ Compared to the nervous people of Paris, the paper portrayed Germans on the home front as calm, having placed great faith in their soldiers.¹⁴⁹ If editors portrayed France as facing an economic crisis, they rendered Germany as on the cusp of great economic expansion. A multi-part series, “German Economic Expansion as Seen by a Frenchman,” detailed this expansion.¹⁵⁰ Future economic strength of Germany lay in three main factors, according to the article; 1) the German character traits of being hardworking, methodical, intelligent, physically strong, and among the lower classes, obedient; 2) their future population growth; 3) the form of politics, in which the middle classes work hard at other endeavors and leave running the nation to a select group.¹⁵¹ The article also lauded Germany’s institutions and bureaucracies, whether it was technical institutes preparing future industrial management, business schools, or Germany’s system of embassies, which utilized economic specialists.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, January 12, 1916; August 13, 1917.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, September 17, 1917; September 12, 1915.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, August 26, 1915; August 27, 1915; December 9, 1915; April 12, 1916; May 22, 1917; July 16, 1918.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, October 15, 1915.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, May 8, 1918; May 16, 1918; May 25, 1918; June 15, 1918. *La Gazette* listed this as a five-part series but the first article was not located in the research for this dissertation.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, May 8, 1918.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, May 16, 1918; June 15, 1918.

La Gazette des Ardennes frequently invoked the approval of neutrals as proof of German justness. The paper included neutral opinion either as an article written specifically for the paper by a neutral or as articles taken from other newspapers. Most frequently, *La Gazette* cited Swiss and Dutch sources. Typical articles of this sort included, “British Imperialism judged by a Swiss,” and “On the Ocean,” taken from the *Nieuwe Courant* of the Hague, which argued that Germany was the true naval power, not England.¹⁵³ The message appears to have been that readers could believe what these articles stated since they came from neutral, supposedly trustworthy sources. Of course, the fact that said articles had been handpicked by *La Gazette* was not lost on readers.

Serials and Advertisements

Serial stories and advertisements did not constitute news received in the occupied zone, but they did provide some diversion in an area generally deprived of new reading material. Over fifty serial stories appeared in *La Gazette des Ardennes* during the war. Most serial stories appear to fit the informational trends that we have identified in the pages of *La Gazette*. Some stories were anti-British. The paper’s editors frequently selected pieces by notable French authors to represent this anti-English sentiment. The first serial that ran in the newspaper was Guy de Maupassant’s “Our English Neighbors.” The three-part short story mocks English culture, describing the people as horrible singers, with unfriendly priests, and women looking as if preserved in vinegar.¹⁵⁴ The newspaper editors penned a three-part series, “What Would Victor Hugo Think of the War?” Their answer was he would be shocked to think Europe’s two most important

¹⁵³ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, September 20, 1918; March 22, 1917.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, February 1, 1915.

nations, France and Germany, would be pitted against each other; after all, Germany is the continent's heart, while France is its head.¹⁵⁵ A two-part report by Max Osborn detailed the damage done to Douai by British shells.¹⁵⁶

Another article by de Maupassant, "The Prisoners," portrayed a respectful relationship forming between a decent German soldier and a young French woman he meets as German troops moved across France during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, demonstrating the common humanity of the two people.¹⁵⁷ Another French writer who had pieces featured in the paper was, rather surprisingly, the patriotic member of *L'Academie Française*, Alfred Capus. The short story, entitled "*Une Dette*" was one of Capus's earlier works, and did not touch upon Franco-German relations.

The newspaper provided an audience to some lesser-known and foreign writers as well: the full text of Swiss writer Joseph Bertourieux's "The Victory," was published over ten issues from May 26, 1917, through June 24, 1917. Marcel Nadaud's "The Flying Poilu: A Story of Aerial Warfare," was published as well.¹⁵⁸ Others were historical pieces, such as Alphonse Daudet's four-part piece on the siege of Berlin and an unsigned three-part series on Napoleon at Saint Helena.¹⁵⁹ Karl May's "The Corsaire," unfolded as a fifteen-part series in 1918. While most stories related to war, some were pure entertainment, such as Edgar Allen Poe's "The Rue Morgue," which ran in nine parts during January and February 1916. As Deborah Buffton notes, such stories offered "a

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., March 5, 1915.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., June 16, 1917; June 17, 1917.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., August 15, 1915.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., May 22, 1917.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., February 15, 1915; February 19, 1915; February 22, 1915; February 26, 1915; November 19, 1915; November 24, 1915; November 28, 1915.

brief respite from the grim realities of daily life” and made the paper a slightly more appealing product to readers.¹⁶⁰

Advertisements first appeared in *La Gazette des Ardennes* in early 1918. These advertisements were different from those found in *Le Bulletin de Lille* and *Le Bulletin de Roubaix*. The local newspapers featured a combination of classified ads and advertisement by local businesses. Almost all the advertisements placed in *La Gazette* were for items unavailable in the occupied zone even if the people did have the money to purchase them. German companies, such as the Benz and Daimler car companies, purchased most of the ad space. While they perhaps believed German soldiers were likely to read the newspaper and would be a potential future market, most likely companies who did business with the military knew buying ads was a great way to keep their largest client happy. Some advertisements, such as those for the car companies, also provided a visual propaganda boost. In ads for both automotive companies, sleek cars appeared alongside German airplanes, suggesting the power of both.

Conclusion

Almost all sources, both contemporary and historic, agree that this newspaper had no real success as a propaganda tool – people simply disregarded the message and took whatever facts they could from it. It is doubtful readers believed any stories expressing opinions on who was winning the war, such as the one that, in the summer of 1915, stated that Germany was prepared for another winter campaign unlike France.¹⁶¹ The propaganda in *La Gazette des Ardennes* was palpable: every issue read like a political

¹⁶⁰ Buffton, 9.

¹⁶¹ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, June 11, 1915.

blog trying to convince people of Germany's justness and might while encouraging a defeatist attitude amongst its readers in the occupied zone. This led many Frenchmen in the occupied zone to refer to the newspaper as the *Gazette des Menteurs*.¹⁶² As one American contemporary wrote, "Although [*La Gazette des Ardennes*] is diabolically cleverly done, ... it would take a stronger agent than the devil himself to inspire faith in the Germans among their victims."¹⁶³ Without a doubt, the people in occupied France were skeptical of German-controlled media sources, and skeptical people believe their skepticism makes them immune to persuasion.¹⁶⁴ While the readers realized *La Gazette des Ardennes'* editors published biased messages that may not have provided complete protection from being slightly influenced. It would be difficult to definitely say what role *La Gazette* played in the rising and falling morale of the French people in the occupied zone. That most people in the occupied zone claimed not to trust it as a source of information is certain.

Despite the manipulation of news, whether through editing or selection of pieces, or publication of clearly biased articles, this newspaper did provide people in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing with a great deal of information. *La Gazette* offered readers updates on battles, news from France, and the rest of the world. Readers could easily extract news out of *La Gazette*, provided they took it with the proverbial grain of salt.

It is worth noting that people in unoccupied France were not receiving unbiased news either. Their news was simply chock-full of French propaganda, rather than German propaganda. While still edited and censored, it was done to create feelings of

¹⁶² McPhail, 125.

¹⁶³ A.S. Hill, "Repatriation Service in France," *The Harvard Advocate* 8 (April, 1918), 332.

¹⁶⁴ Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson, *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2001), 332.

hope rather than despair. Of course readers everywhere during the war were left wondering what news was not being included – a sensation that surely was the root cause behind so many lamentations in the occupied zone about the lack of news. Most likely Marshall McLuhan’s statement “the medium is the message” was true in the case of *La Gazette des Ardennes*. Even relatively positive news allowed in via war communiqués seemed tainted by the medium. Conversely, perhaps even negative news received through the clandestine press or dropped papers may have been seen as positive. Although *La Gazette* was the most consistent source of news for the people of the occupied zone, they hated it. The newspaper *Le Progrès du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais* celebrated the “death” of the *La Gazette* with great glee.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Buffton, 198.

Chapter Seven:

German Imported Belgian Papers 1:

La Belgique

Belgium shared northern France's unfortunate fate of falling under German occupation early during the First World War. By December 1914, ninety percent of Belgium was under German control – a situation that would last more than fifty months for the seven million who had to learn to live with the harsh repression of occupation.¹ During the first days of the occupation, Belgium's press was unable to function, and any available reports came from German press correspondents and army combat correspondents that traveled with the invading armies.² German authorities completely quashed the Belgian press within the first weeks of occupation and subjected it to severe censorship.³ While most Belgian newspapers rejected German terms and simply ceased publication, some papers did reappear under strict German regulation. Sophie de Schaepdrijver notes that the Belgians referred to these newspapers as the *emboché* press – meaning media infested by the *boche*, an unflattering slang term for the Germans.⁴ Newspapers that reappeared after being “carefully expurgated and falsified by a rigorous censorship” included *Le Quotidien*, *Le Bruxellois*, *L'Echo de Bruxelles*, *Les Dernières Nouvelles*, *La Belge*, *La Belgique*, *La Patrie*, and *L'Avenir*.⁵ The Belgian populace

¹ For an insightful examination of Belgium's occupation, please see Larry Zuckerman's *The Rape of Belgium: the Untold Story of World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

² Desmond, 302.

³ Sophie de Schaepdrijver, “Occupation, Propaganda and the Idea of Belgium,” in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918*, Aviel Roshwald & Richard Stites, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 271.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jean Massart, *Belgians under the German Eagle*, trans. Bernard Miall (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd,

regarded with suspicion such papers but still read them due to the difficulty in attaining news. For varying lengths of time, the German occupiers chose to import three of the German-overseen Belgian papers into occupied France.

Abbé August Leman, writing shortly after the war ended, remembered that the German occupiers imported two Belgian newspapers into Lille during the first months of occupation, *La Belgique* from Brussels and *Le Bien Public* from Ghent.⁶ However, the German authorities soon deemed the two newspapers unreliable implements of occupation and forbade them in occupied France after February 1915. *Le Bruxellois*, a much less independent newspaper than the aforementioned ones, was available in the cities of occupied France throughout most of the war. The Germans advertised *Le Bruxellois* alongside the *Gazette des Ardennes* in the locally produced French newspapers, such as the *Bulletin de Roubaix*. The German occupiers' propaganda varied between the areas they controlled; hence these imported Belgian newspapers provided unique information as compared to the local German-controlled newspapers, supplying international news, news of the war through communiqués, and insight into the lives of others living under German occupation.

La Belgique began publication under German control on Thursday November 5, 1914, run by two Belgian stockbrokers of German origin, Josse Moressée and Martin Ghesquière.⁷ Jean Massart insists that no existing Belgian newspapers agreed to publish under German control, and that newspapers such as *La Belgique* were different entities,

1916), 15. These were the French newspapers placed under German control. German policies toward the Dutch-language newspapers, and indeed the Dutch-speaking Belgian areas, differed in some ways than from those imposed in of French-speaking Belgium.

⁶ August Leman, "Lille sous l'occupation allemande: Les héros du journalisme," *Pages Actuelle 1914-1915* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1919), 3.

⁷ Michaël Amara and Hubert Roland, *Gouverner en Belgique occupée: Oscar von der Lancken-Wakenitz – Rapports d'Activité 1915-1918* (Brussels: P.I.E. – Peter Lang, 2004), 77.

simply utilizing pre-war names.⁸ Usually a daily two-page paper, it was sometimes expanded to three or four pages and quickly became occupied Belgium's most widely read newspaper.⁹ The first eight issues of the paper carried identical lead articles, defending the editorial staff's decision to produce a censored paper. The staff maintained that the people were being deprived of their needed "daily intellectual ration,"¹⁰ and had hence turned to black market foreign newspapers and taking extracts from papers that have been greatly changed or almost invented.¹¹ While the police attempted to find the authors of these invented pieces of news, the article continued, *La Belgique* would provide the people of Brussels a newspaper they could read with confidence, despite the moral issue of working under German censors.¹² German censorship did greatly affect both the content and the tone of the newspaper. The German Governor of occupied Belgium, Oscar von der Lancken-Wakenitz, described *La Belgique* as the Belgian newspaper most ready to cooperate with the Germans, while trying to create an image of maintaining its Belgian character and independence from the Germans.¹³ However, unlike the *Bulletin de Lille* or *Bulletin de Roubaix*, there were news sources present in *La Belgique* that were not purely German. The diffusion of this "outside" information in occupied France allowed its people greater knowledge of occurrences outside their territory than historians usually acknowledge. Therefore, it is important to examine what

⁸ Jean Massart, *The Secret Press in Belgium*. Trans. Bernard Miall (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1918), 78.

⁹ Amara and Roland, 77.

¹⁰ "la ration de nourriture intellectuelle."

¹¹ The article does not name the foreign newspapers, but newspapers from unoccupied France and England sold on the black market. The invented news pieces refers to that fact that people would purchase French and English newspapers on the black market, then copy from them, using a typewriter, the most significant passages, and secretly distribute these copies. The article is not referring to the famous Belgian clandestine newspaper, *La Libre Belgique*, as it started published February 1, 1915. Massart, 7, 12.

¹² *La Belgique*, Nov. 5, 1914 – Nov. 13, 1914.

¹³ Amara and Roland, 79.

news penetrated occupied France via *La Belgique* and in what form. The newspaper published official communiqués from both the Allies and Central Powers, albeit heavily censored or altered. The Germans allowed some news from a non-German perspective in the paper, conceivably to create the illusion that *La Belgique* was a relatively independent newspaper. Minor pieces of good news for the British or French made it into the newspaper, but rarely positive news with major ramifications. Perhaps the Germans thought that readers would believe this was unbiased news, and that these minor reports were the only good news for the Allies. At times, however, people working for the newspaper, motivated by humor or patriotism, slipped by German censors the odd tidbit the Germans would not have chosen to print.

A recurring article that counted how many days the war had raged provided recent battle developments and analysis of current war events in addition to the communiqués. Even beyond these articles and war analysis, international news not directly tied to the war was a common feature in this newspaper. For the few months that German authorities allowed it into occupied France, *La Belgique* provided news of what was going on in both occupied France (but was not commonly known) and the rest of France, from which the German zone was so painfully cut off. It also allowed its readers in occupied France to gain insight into suffering that was going on elsewhere in Europe because of the war, and also to learn the places where the situation was not as dire.

Official Communiqués

Due to the timeframe that this newspaper was for sale in occupied France, it makes sense to focus upon its coverage of the First Battle of Ypres. Any Lillois who

read the third issue of *La Belgique* surely was thrilled to learn from a two-day old Paris communiqué that in spite of violent German attacks the Allies had made good progress in the Ypres region.¹⁴ It is extremely interesting that German censors allowed this communiqué to pass, as it is an example of French propaganda. On October 31, 1914, the Germans captured Gheluvett at noon, and this briefly appeared to be the turning point in the first Battle of Ypres, as the town's fall broke the BEF's line and created the possibility of a devastating flank attack.¹⁵ However, a counterattack forced the Germans back and reestablished the British line. Over the next two days, the Germans captured the strategic ridges at Messines and Wytschaele, causing the British and French to withdraw from these ridges and concentrate their forces on the defense of Ypres.¹⁶ Revealing the French positive spin on this situation may have been valuable to the German authorities if readers in the occupied cities had any way on knowing what was actually happening in Ypres and the surrounding area. With distrust of the Germans and confidence in any positive news seeping in from other sources, it is unlikely the readership of Lille, Roubaix, or Tourcoing would have doubted the French communiqué.

Readers' renewed sense of hope might have been quickly diluted however, upon reading the Berlin communiqué reporting that the Germans repulsed British and French attacks near Nieuport without any difficulty.¹⁷ The German controlled newspaper omitted to report that water tactically unleashed by the Belgians by opening the sluice gates of the coastal dikes forced the Germans to withdraw from the area between Dixmude and Nieuport, allowing the Belgian King Albert to keep a portion of his country out of

¹⁴ *La Belgique*, Nov. 7, 1914.

¹⁵ Burg and Purcell, 33.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *La Belgique*, Nov. 7, 1914.

German hands.¹⁸ Every issue of *La Belgique* issued between November 5, 1914 and February 26, 1915, (the date that the paper stopped being available in France; the First Battle of Ypres ended in mid-November, 1914) featured a section entitled “Official Communiqués.”¹⁹ In most issues, this section contained on average twenty to twenty-five blurbs, ranging in length from a sentence to a paragraph. In most editions, approximately the same number of communiqués from the Allied and German sides was printed. This general trend did have exceptions, however – on November 8, 1914, the paper included triple the number of communiqués from the Germans and Austrians, but on February 8, printed four Allied pieces and only one communiqué from Germany.²⁰ The quality (in terms of detail and relevance) and topics of the communiqués were approximately equivalent from both sides, with the only notable difference being that Allied reports were often more outdated by two-to-three days as compared to German and Austrian reports.

La Belgique included communiqués from many of the countries fighting in the war. Beyond the frequent statements out of Paris, London, Petrograd, Berlin, and Vienna, the newspaper included communiqués from Delhi, Pretoria, Constantinople, Budapest, Tokyo, Copenhagen (in neutral Denmark), Kapstadt (South Africa), Cetinje (Montenegro), and Nisch (Serbia).²¹ Some communiqués originated from Bordeaux when

¹⁸ Burg and Purcell, 32.

¹⁹ The November 22, 1914 issue included this section, but had no news from any Allied sources, which usually included news from Paris, London, and Petrograd. It was explained that no communiqués had been received by the time they went to press that day, and that they were certain this was due to communication difficulties.

²⁰ *La Belgique*, Nov. 8, 1914, and Feb. 8, 1915.

²¹ Many of these governments’ communiqués were included in several issues of *La Belgique*. For a sample of these communiqués, the Nov. 15, 1914 issue provides sound representation, as it included dispatches from Pretoria, Constantinople, Budapest, Kapstadt, and Copenhagen. The Nov. 10, 1914 issue provides an example of a Delhi dispatch, while the Nov. 17, 1914 issue included news from Tokyo and Cetinje. Nisch dispatches can be found in the Nov. 21, 1914, and Nov. 26, 1914 issues.

the French government temporarily moved there from Paris, but they were relatively few in number.²²

Despite the variety of governments whose communiqués appeared in the newspaper, the majority of dispatches originated from France, Britain, Russia, Germany, and to a lesser extent, Austria. Robert Desmond, in his study of World War I journalism, *Windows on the World: World News Reporting 1900-1920*, claims that the preponderance of war coverage was concentrated on the Western Front of Belgium and France, while coverage was less intensive on the Eastern Front.²³ This does not hold true for coverage in *La Belgique*. While it is true more news in the form of “Official Communiqués” came from the Western Front, the difference between the amount of news from the Western Eastern and Fronts was not that great considering how directly affected the lives of the readers of *La Belgique* were by fighting in France and Belgium. When combined with news in the “This Day in War” section (to be discussed subsequently) the Eastern Front received a great deal of attention in this newspaper. One could speculate that this was because the war on the Eastern Front was proving relatively more successful for Germany, although the paper also included news of Russian success. What matters for this dissertation, however, is that between November 1914 and February 1915, occupied France received news from official communiqués from both major fronts of the war.

Some of the French communiqués were military communiqués while others originated from the Havas agency. The content and style varied little between the two sources. This is not surprisingly, as, in actuality, all French news from the front came from the same source: the French military. This information was often-time misleading,

²² An example dispatch can be found in the Dec. 5, 1914 issue of *La Belgique*.

²³ Desmond, 279.

made only the more disingenuous in *La Belgique* by German censors, who edited the communiqués in the reverse direction of the original propaganda. Despite this, French communiqués in this imported Belgian paper did allow occupied France to hear a somewhat more distorted version of military facts than that received by their compatriots in free France. They were given the same hope that “in general, the situation on the whole front is very satisfactory for our armies,” when they were told the German attacks from the direction of Dixmude and northeast of Ypres were pushed back.²⁴ They could place hope on an official report discussed in a Paris communiqué that stated during the week of November 21-27 enemy attacks were becoming less violent at the same time Allied counter-attacks were causing more serious losses for the other side (the Germans allowed themselves to be referred as the enemy in Allied communiqués).²⁵ The next month another French communiqué reported that the Allies took an enemy trench west of the Arras-Lille route that had been a major obstacle.²⁶ Burg and Purcell described the entire Western Front as having settled into a near-stasis of “trench warfare,” with only inconsequential movements back and forth by this time.²⁷ These communiqués let in just enough information about unproductive days as well to make them appear creditable, that they were sharing all information, and when nothing occurred, they reported that. A November 11, 1914, Paris communiqué made the qualified observation that between Nieuport and Lys the Allies had *generally* (italics inserted) held their position, and while the Germans had taken Dixmude, the Allies were on the outskirts of the town.²⁸ In the

²⁴ *La Belgique*, Nov. 11, 1914. “En général, la situation sur tout le front est très satisfaisante pour nos armées.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, December 3, 1914.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Feb. 8, 1915.

²⁷ Burg and Purcell, 49.

²⁸ *La Belgique*, Nov. 14, 1914.

newspaper published two days later, a London communiqué admitted that near Ypres both sides suffered considerable losses.²⁹ When the First Battle of Ypres settled into trench warfare around November 13, 1914, German casualties had reached 130,000 and British and French casualties each numbered approximately 58,000.³⁰ Readers in occupied France would continue to receive battle news from *La Belgique* for three months after the First Battle of Ypres.

Readers also received rare news about battle outcomes close to them, when they learned Lille had been the jumping off point for a furious German attack that the French communiqué claimed Allied forces not only pushed back but destroyed some of the German defenses in the process.³¹ David F. Burg and L. Edward Purcell do not refer to any such German attack, with their only reference to Lille being that the British sent a force to attack the city on January 18, 1915, but the Germans successfully repulsed the attack. Overall, the tide of battle during the first days of 1915 in northern France and Belgium favored the Germans.³² It is plausible conjecture that the German-controlled paper included this information to demonstrate the duplicity in some French communiqués, as the people of Lille would most likely have known if a military attack utilized their city as a base.

Printing the German and Austrian communiqués beside them revealed the potential embellishments in the Allied communiqués. Just as the French communiqués relied heavily on the Havas Press Agency, and the British relied upon Reuters, German communiqués relied upon the Wolff press agency for many of its reports. German

²⁹ Ibid., Nov. 16, 1914.

³⁰ Burg and Purcell, 35.

³¹ *La Belgique*, January 10, 1915.

³² Allen L. Churchill. *The Story of the Great War*, Volume III (BiblioBazaar, 2006), 224.

communiqués read much like those of the Allies only suggesting Germany would eventually win the war. One difference between the two sides communiqués was the German preference for quantifying their victories. For example, harking back to the First Battle of Ypres, a Paris notice in the November 13, 1914, issue stated that their side had had a good day and made progress toward Langemark and Dixmude. The German communiqué stated that east of Ypres they captured seven hundred French soldiers, along with four cannons and four machine guns.³³ The Germans also lent creditability to their communiqués by allowing in such lackluster news as admitting that their attacks in Flanders were progressing slowly, or that no change in the front was occurring because frozen land and snowstorms were proving to be obstacles.³⁴

On numerous occasions German and Allied news sources resembled wars of words, as each side attempted to portray its efforts in the best light. One dispatch countered Allied assertions that in Alsace the French retook Aspach-le-Haut and Aspach-le-Bas. Rather, the Germans contended they had voluntarily left the first because it was of no importance and the latter was still under their control.³⁵ While Aspach-le-Bas was still under German control, the Germans did not voluntarily leave Aspach-le-Haut, but lost it to Allied forces. Later on that month, a Berlin dispatch claimed French and Russian dispatches lauding the capture of twenty thousand German soldiers on the Eastern Front was pure invention.³⁶ On December 3, 1914, the Serbian First Army launched an unexpected counterattack at the Battle of the Ridges surprising the *Austrian* – not German – Sixth Army. After three days of battle, the Austrians retreated towards the

³³ *La Belgique*, Nov. 13, 1914.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Nov. 18, 1914 and Nov. 21, 1914.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Dec. 6, 1914.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Dec. 15, 1914.

Kolubara River, during which the Serbians captured forty thousand *Austrian* prisoners, as well as large quantities of guns and ammunition.³⁷

Usually the differences in interpretations were apparent as communiqués ran beside each other telling different versions of the same battle. Rarely did communiqués utterly contradict each other, as Allied and Central Powers' stories each focused on slightly different areas of the battle. Thus, both sides discussed the battle southeast of Ypres in one issue of the newspaper, but while the French noted that the Germans failed to take the Nieuport Bridge, the Germans focused on the fact that they had captured prisoners.³⁸ Again, neither side mentioned the opening of the sluice gates of the coastal dikes to flood the area between the Yser and the railway extending from Dixmude to Nieuport, the defining action of fighting near Nieuport.³⁹ In almost every edition of the paper both sides touted what they gained in a particular skirmish, with the only exception being when one or both sides declared it had been a relatively calm day. Berlin notices also provided coverage of Allied bombing of occupied areas, emphasizing the systematic nature of their attacks and how they appeared to be indifferent that they were killing their compatriots.⁴⁰ There were rarely Allied communiqués that discussed these events. This section of the newspaper did provide readers in occupied France with a great deal more news about the actual battles underway, but it also surely must have left readers bemused at what was actually happening. To clarify the confusion, the editors of *La Belgique*

³⁷ On December 15, 1914, Serbian troops retook Belgrade. Burg and Purcell, 37-38.

³⁸ *La Belgique*, Nov. 17, 1914.

³⁹ Burg and Purcell, 31-2.

⁴⁰ *La Belgique*, Jan. 4, 1915 and Jan. 8, 1915.

provided a daily column, in which they could write as “impartial observers” and share their insight with readers.⁴¹

Day 93 – Day 207 of the War & Other International News

Starting in the second issue of the newspaper and running for the rest of the time the Germans imported it into occupied France, the lead article’s title reflected how many days since the war began (i.e. Day 93 of the war was November 6, 1914, Day 94 of the war was November 7, 1914, etc.). This article, always the first one to appear in the paper, provided analysis of war events and something akin to an editorial voice to the paper.⁴² Based on the communiqués, the editors of the paper scrutinized the situation and reported upon it, much like reporters in non-occupied areas. After commenting that the communiqués had followed their usual formula of stating that nothing was new, on day 97 of the war *La Belgique*’s editors noted that both sides testified to their small victories in the same area northeast of Ypres. After examining these different viewpoints of the same war front, the editors supposed that this war was greatly different from those of the past – no one grand battle would decide a victor.⁴³ They even went so far as to make predictions, speculating in late November that the status quo in Flanders would not change over the winter months.⁴⁴ The stated aim of this feature was to offer insight into the communiqués, which the paper blatantly called biased and confusing, pointing out the failings in these reports created by censorship and propaganda. They recognized the

⁴¹ Ibid., Nov. 30, 1914.

⁴² Editorializing in the sense of expressing criticism of various military strategies was rare, but at times, this section of the paper posed questions such as, when will the Allies finally decide upon a decisive action. Dec. 19, 1914.

⁴³ Ibid., Nov. 10, 1914.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Nov. 24, 1914.

nervousness of newspaper readers, stating that worried people existed not only in occupied territories but also even in neutral countries such as Holland.⁴⁵ In the day 161 article, editors observed that while the Allies reported they had voluntarily abandoned sections of the trenches near Arras, the Berlin report claimed the Germans took the trenches in a surprise attack that awoke the defenders from their beds. The authors commented to their readers that such conflicting reports of the same event made communiqués difficult to interpret and, implicitly suggested, to trust.⁴⁶ A month earlier the editors' message had been much more explicit. It began by stating that the communiqués from the Allied armies continued to be flawed, making it extremely difficult to comment impartially on the day-to-day events of the war.⁴⁷ It is most likely lost to history whether they also believed German communiqués were also flawed; if they did, that fact was not reported or was censored out. Nevertheless, the message remains that *La Belgique* endeavored to appear to remain a dispassionate journal of news. Editors stated that they understood it to be prudent during the difficult times of war that military authorities censor truth and falsehoods, but because of that, official communiqués were unreliable until confirmed from other sources.⁴⁸ This section used communiqués and some outside newspapers from all sides, attempting to piece the stories together. Thus, readers in occupied France briefly received some attempts at accurate journalistic coverage of the war. Even censored, this section provided greater detail about events than historians long believed permeated the Lille region.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Dec. 6, 1914.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Jan. 11, 1915.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Dec. 10, 1914.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Dec. 5, 1914.

This section of the newspaper provided extensive coverage of the Eastern Front, which it described as unfolding in a particularly disconcerting manner.⁴⁹ The newspaper's almost daily coverage included information about the Eastern Front, in particular activities in Polish Russia, which was a very active battlefield in November 1914. The article often lamented that more news was coming out of Berlin and Vienna, than Petrograd, not allowing the newspaper to confirm stories. During the First World War, the Russian press had to submit to both military and political censorship. Censorship in Russia was more severe than in any other warring nation, as its limited tradition of freedom of the press only dated back to the 1905 revolution, after which the press was relatively free to articulate its own position on foreign policy.⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, however, the two dispatches received from Petrograd in time for the "Day 110," contradicted Berlin's version of events.⁵¹ *La Belgique's* editors even commented on the tone of communiqués. They juxtaposed the laconic German communiqués from the Western Front with the optimistic dispatches from Vienna after the Austrians took 15,000 Russian prisoners.⁵² Coverage from the Eastern Front was often hard to confirm, causing stories to unfold over days rather than in one article. In "Day 117," *La Belgique* reported, with the caveat that the story had to be confirmed, that the Russians had won an important victory on November 26, 1914 near Lodz.⁵³ The reality was the Russians had encircled a large number of German troops, but when the Russian leader Rennenkampf failed to seal off the northern escape route, the Germans broke through and smashed a

⁴⁹ Ibid., Dec. 18, 1914.

⁵⁰ Sidney Ploss, *The Roots of Perestroika: The Soviet Breakdown in Historical Context* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFraland and Co. Inc, 2010), 212 and William Mulligan, *The Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139.

⁵¹ *La Belgique*, Nov. 23, 1914.

⁵² Ibid., Nov. 24, 1914.

⁵³ Ibid., Nov. 30, 1914.

Siberian division to capture thousands of prisoners.⁵⁴ By the December 2, 1914, edition of *La Belgique* a story closer to the actual events began to emerge, and in the next day's paper, editors noted the German army's success in an article that took up a large portion of the first page.⁵⁵ Towards the end of *La Belgique*'s importation into occupied northern France, the newspaper began to include maps to help its readers locate some of the obscure Eastern European towns that were now be featured in this section. In eight issues, maps allowed people to better visualize the war news they were receiving from the Eastern Front.⁵⁶

War coverage did not end with the lead article of *La Belgique*. Approximately half the issues received in occupied northern France included another article, providing detailed analysis of a certain aspect of the war. Again, several articles dealt with the war in Eastern Europe, and most read as if written by a neutral observer. While one article on the war in Eastern Europe provided an obvious German slant, reminding readers that hostilities between Russia and Austria and Germany began with a violent attack on eastern Germany by the Russians, other articles provided rather detailed, unbiased, fact-based looks at the composition of the Russian army, noting many of its strengths.⁵⁷ Quite frequently, articles provided a great deal of information, including the names of particular side's warships and their tonnage.⁵⁸ Several articles examined the British military situation, including topics such as retired British warships, the British naval budget, and an examination of the British military, including their use of non-European soldiers

⁵⁴ Burg and Purcell, 36.

⁵⁵ *La Belgique*, December 3, 1914.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Maps of various European locations that readers would be less familiar with were published in the Jan. 25, 1915, Jan. 28, 1915, Feb. 3, 1915, Feb. 4, 1915, Feb. 8, 1915, Feb. 15, 1915, Feb. 23, 1915, and Feb. 24, 1915. A few maps of battle lines in better known regions like Verdun were also printed.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1914 and Nov. 23, 1914.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1914.

(referred to as soldiers of color from India).⁵⁹ While one could search for propaganda in these articles and claim they contained bias against the Allied powers, much is open to interpretation, with the articles containing no overtly prejudiced comments for the time.⁶⁰ Thus, while an article on the Turkish and Russian fleets stated that the Russian ships were inferior to other nations' warships and that none could go faster than sixteen miles an hour, many historians would claim that was simply a statement of fact rather than propaganda against an Allied country. Under the pen name Ray Nyst, one or several writers for *La Belgique* did write articles propounding the German cause. His articles frequently encouraged pacifism. Pacifism was a German talking point that the authorities hoped would convince occupied people to want to seek a negotiated peace. In contrast to the Ray Nyst pieces, many articles read like neutral analyses, including a retrospective published in January 1915, which chronicled the events of the first five months of the war.⁶¹ Other articles considered the nature of war conducted in mountainous regions, the role weather played in the war, and a lengthy discussion of trench warfare, including six diagrams to illustrate key concepts.⁶² It would take an active imagination to discern any propaganda or bias in these articles. One article in particular, whose author described the destructive power of French bombs, even seemed to be pro-Allied powers.⁶³

International news beyond the war received coverage in *La Belgique*. Most days the paper had a section devoted to "Diverse Dispatches," which supplied a few sentences

⁵⁹ Ibid., Feb. 8, 1915, Feb. 20, 1915, and Nov. 21, 1914.

⁶⁰ By modern day standards comments made about "soldiers of color" would be considered extremely offensive, however one must hesitate to apply today's standards to texts of a different time period and claim them to be blatant propaganda against the British.

⁶¹ Ibid., Jan. 7, 1915. Furthermore it is interesting to note that this article included a header that stated it was published due to readers' requests for a recap of war events and was compiled using sources in the French and English press. To help clarify early events a map was included of the Austro-Serbian theatre of war.

⁶² Ibid., Dec. 19, 1914; Jan. 25, 1915 and Feb. 24, 1915.

⁶³ Ibid., Nov. 17, 1914.

on world topics. These sections came mostly from other newspapers and cited their sources, providing readers with a small connection to news sources that the Germans otherwise banned. Sometimes the newspapers included longer articles about world news. Political turmoil in Italy was a frequent subject matter, as was the Mexican civil war and the fall of Tsingtau in China.⁶⁴ Not surprisingly, American events received a disproportionate amount of coverage. Much of it related directly to the war, as snippets and articles weighed facts in deciding to which side in the war the U.S. was leaning.⁶⁵ Some articles on the United States simply reported facts without any slant, such as those discussing American elections.⁶⁶ It is highly probable that some news was simply reporting on hard-to-learn-about current events that a responsible newspaper would want to publish and that would lead news-deprived people in occupied zones to buy the paper. Reports about the Bank of the Russian Empire placing five and half million rubles at the disposal of cotton manufacturers to purchase cotton from Egypt and the United States could hint that the Russian economy was having a difficult time adjusting to war time needs, or could just be providing information.⁶⁷ Another report stated that, according to the Hague Convention, warring nations could not utilize the Panama Canal to replenish their supplies.⁶⁸

News about France and Insight into the Suffering of Others

“Happenings of the Day” and “Diverse Dispatches” were two sections of *La Belgique* that frequently carried information about unoccupied France. However, the

⁶⁴ Ibid., Nov. 5, 1914; Nov. 10, 1914; Nov. 16, 1914; Nov. 18, 1914 and Nov. 19, 1914.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Nov. 18, 1914.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Nov. 8, 1914.

⁶⁷ Ibid., December 22, 1914.

⁶⁸ Ibid., November 19, 1914.

news provided was usually brief and at times haphazard in the level of coverage – minor incidents could be reported in detail while major events occurring that day could be ignored. An example of brevity occurred in the January 30, 1915, newspaper, when, in two sentences, it was noted that the French Chamber of Deputies would meet on February 4, in the Bourbon Palace in Paris. The Chamber planned to ratify decrees on finance, customs, and financial dealings with Austria-Hungry and Germany.⁶⁹ However, the newspaper did not report upon other routine meetings such as this one. French political coverage was nothing more than random blurbs of information. The movements of French President Poincaré received modest coverage, in particular his visits to the front, such as when he went to Clermont-en-Argonne and Reims in December 1914.⁷⁰ As random as French news coverage may have been, items in *La Belgique* demonstrate that at least until early 1915, the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing received some news about the rest of their country. Lille and its surrounding areas were not completely isolated from the rest of France in terms of news. While the amount of this news was often paltry, to state it was non-existent would be an exaggeration.

A few articles may have even proved useful (beyond the importance people placed on being informed) to the people of occupied France. They would have learned about the treatment of people escaping northern France for Paris who did not have financial resources or family members in the capital. Authorities quickly created a floating village in Paris made of barges in the Seine to provide shelter for refugees from Belgium and northern France.⁷¹ Created by a wood merchant named Liève, two barges housed families, a third housed single men, and a fourth sheltered single women, while a

⁶⁹ Ibid., Jan. 30, 1915.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Dec. 3, 1914 & Dec. 18, 1914.

⁷¹ Ibid., Dec. 24, 1914.

fifth acted as a dining hall for all. *La Belgique* also provided the odd speck of news happening around occupied France. Annette Becker notes that although news was not abundant in occupied France, rumors were. People heard and read the news in the version approved by the Germans, including military communiqués, and interpreted them, while trying to distinguish any real news of Allied forces from the German propaganda.⁷² In such an environment reading a Paris communiqué stating that just north of Lille the Allies had pushed back two enemy-attacks must have been a received as a gift.⁷³ Other useful news relayed by the Belgian paper included lists of French prisoners of war being held in Germany, and rules for communicating with prisoners of war via the Red Cross.⁷⁴

While it may have been hard for people in the occupied zone to reflect on others' suffering, several articles in *La Belgique* revealed that different areas shared some degree of adversity. The most obvious partners in suffering were the Belgians. Reading a newspaper aimed at the Belgians, people in occupied France could see that the Germans also expected others to pay war taxes, and live under strict rules of occupation.⁷⁵ Despite many of the shared rules and regulations, French readers might have also gained a false sense that the Belgians were being ordered around in a kinder tone. German decrees in *La Belgique* did not scream from the lead position in an intimidating bold print. Rather, they usually appeared on the second page of the newspaper, often in the center of the middle column. While Governor-General Moritz von Bissing often issued the orders in the name

⁷² Becker, "Life in an Occupied Zone: Lille, Roubaix, Tourcoing," 631.

⁷³ *La Belgique*, Nov. 18, 1914. One might question why German censors would let such information into a newspaper they controlled. Other articles one would assume the Germans to find poor reading material for their occupied audience included details on how to pass light signals across distances (Nov. 23, 1914), a positive discussion of Joffre's energetic offensive (Dec. 23, 1914), and a historical review on the end of the siege of Paris in 1871 (Feb. 4, 1915).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Jan. 8, 1915 and Dec. 11, 1914.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Nov. 12, 1914 and Nov. 16, 1914.

of the public good, authorities in occupied France did not apply this fig leaf to similarly harsh rules.⁷⁶ In occupied France, the Germans allowed different areas to have only limited contact with each other, as the German occupiers isolated them into municipal enclaves. So to see that this newspaper kept people in Brussels current on events happening in other areas of the country (never mind all the news from the rest of Europe) must have been a bitter pill for the readers of occupied France. On its second page, *La Belgique* usually carried a section entitled “Life in Our Provinces.” People in northern France who had to live without such news must have envied the Belgium neighbors. The tone and lay-out of the German-controlled newspapers in Belgium may have been more moderate than those produced in occupied France, but that did not mean the hardships of life in occupied Belgium were any less. Brand Whitlock, the American Ambassador to Belgium described Belgium under German occupation as a place where, “the very air is poisoned with militarism, one has a constant sense of personal discomfort...one cannot voice one’s own thoughts.”⁷⁷ Describing among other evils the torture of those who refused to work for the Germans and the jailing of thousands on contrived charges, Larry Zuckerman states, “Occupied Belgium was a forerunner of Nazi Europe.”⁷⁸ If the Belgian imported newspaper suggested any less to readers in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, it was a misrepresentation of fact.

La Belgique informed its readers about how the citizenries of London and Paris suffered during the war. Readers of *La Belgique* on November 24, 1914, would have

⁷⁶ Ibid., Jan. 14, 1915. While nobody would claim the occupation of Belgium was anything but harsh, many historians agree that past the invasion stage, it was less severe than that imposed on northern France. In the Dec. 24, 1914 issue an article outlined laws regulating the working of women and children, which actually went further, according to this article, than the laws preexisting the German invasion of Belgium.

⁷⁷ Zuckerman, 103.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1-2.

learned that in London stores had to close by 8pm and no light could be visible outside by police order. High society no longer held parties, as most of the great families were involved with the Red Cross. Business remained calm during the day and at teatime musicians still played in many restaurants.⁷⁹ In Paris as well, the police prefect ordered that restaurants must close by 10pm. and cafes by 8pm.⁸⁰ *La Belgique* reported that the Parisian population faced strict restriction on light usage to make zeppelin attacks more problematical.⁸¹ People in unoccupied France were also facing shortages of white bread and instead were eating brown bread; sugar prices were high (because most beet sugar production occurred in occupied France) and coal was becoming scarce.⁸² Juxtaposed against these hardships were stories that revealed some gaiety remained to life in the French capital. *La Belgique* reprinted a fashion story from the French newspaper *Le Matin*, noting that wool was the fabric of the season. The newspaper, in one of its few attempts at transparent propaganda, suggested it superficial to concern oneself with such trivial matters at such a dark hour.⁸³

The other group that faced hardships equal to those in occupied France were the men fighting in the trenches. As one article noted, the war was long for everyone, but it was longer for the men in the trenches and the women and parents missing them.⁸⁴ Hew Strachan places the horrors of the trenches in context, noting that trenches created health problems – particularly the ones dug out of the cultivated soil of Belgium and northern France, which encouraged the rapid infection of wounds with gangrene – but saved

⁷⁹ *La Belgique*, Nov. 24, 1914.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Dec. 2, 1914.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1915.

⁸² *Ibid.*, Nov. 22, 1914.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Dec. 11, 1914.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Dec. 22, 1914.

lives.⁸⁵ The quality of life varied between trenches, as some had wood floors and were well built, while others were nothing more than basic mud-holes. Not only was life dismal in most the trenches, with lice and rats spreading disease and soldiers standing in cold, wet mud dealing with trench foot and frostbite, but the trench system allowed fighting to be continuous.⁸⁶ News of soldiers was the most coveted and often the least available, unless the enemy captured them and their names appeared on prisoner of war lists.

Conclusion

In Maxence van der Meersch's fictional account of life in occupied France during the Great War, *Invasion*, the importance, and deficit of news is a recurring theme. He writes that since October 1914, "news from France had entirely ceased. A steel curtain had been lowered between the occupied districts and the rest of the world. What was happening to the French troops? Why was the German army being allowed to hold ground here? How long would it stay?"⁸⁷ *La Belgique* answered a few of these questions. The German occupiers chose to import this newspaper into occupied France for approximately four months, but a small percentage of the time under occupation. During this paper's brief sojourn in occupied France, it did provide snippets of news – sometimes surprisingly candid news considering it was supposed to be a tool inhibiting the hope in its readers. Readers received a broad spectrum of news, but coverage of most topics was concise. One exception to this rule was submarine coverage. Like other

⁸⁵ Strachan, 163.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 163-5. The February 4, 1915 issue of *La Belgique* carried an article devoted to frozen feet in the trenches, including suggested preventative methods and remedies.

⁸⁷ van der Meersch, 82.

German-controlled newspapers, *La Belgique* provided readers with extensive coverage of German submarine news. However, this most likely was not a noteworthy element of this newspaper's content for French readers, as *La Gazette des Ardennes* already provided all the submarine news an occupied Frenchmen could possibly want.

Despite its German censors, *La Belgique* provided glimpses of unbiased news. Perhaps the German censors allowed this news through to lend creditability to the idea of *La Belgique* still being a Belgian newspaper, separate from the German authorities. As Sophie De Schaepdrijver notes, the propaganda in this newspaper was subtle, the newspaper "...did not sing the praises of the Kaiser," but aimed to quietly garner favor for the occupiers' position.⁸⁸ This would be even more so the case in the less well-controlled imported Belgian paper, *Le Bien Public*.

⁸⁸ "...elles ne chantaient pas les louanges du Kaiser..." De Schaepdrijver, 122.

Chapter Eight
German Imported Belgian Papers 2:
Le Bien Public

Le Bien Public of Ghent began publishing under German control on October 14, 1914, when only two days prior it had been a Belgian paper decrying German aggression. During the years preceding the war, *Le Bien Public* was a patriotic newspaper, with German rather than French sympathies when reporting upon international affairs.¹ Before the war, this newspaper opposed allowing the use of Flemish at the University of Ghent, and the 1898 *Loi d'Égalité*, which legally placed French and Flemish on equally footing throughout Belgium.² The editors began this first issue under occupation with an article entitled "To Our Readers," in which they acknowledged the inevitably precarious position of a patriotic Belgian newspaper that was continuing to print under German rule.³ This daily newspaper's editors expanded upon their position further in the next edition, stating that they wanted to keep publishing as a Belgian, Catholic newspaper whose new aim would be to give their readers a feeling of calm and confidence and deliver useful, albeit limited, information.⁴ The editors discussed the obstacles they faced gathering news, noting that they had to base coverage of war operations strictly on official communications from various governments. While the German authorities agreed not to *impose* any information on the paper, they did review it prior to publication

¹ Marie-Thérèse Bitsch, *La Belgique entre la France et l'Allemagne: 1905-1914* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1992), 280, 400. For an overview of *Le Bien Public*'s relationship with the Vatican during the nineteenth century, see Émile Théodore and Joseph Hubert Banning, *La Belgique et le Vatican* (Brussels: Bruylant-Christophe et Cie, 1880).

² Amara and Roland, 87.

³ *Le Bien Public*, Oct. 14, 1914.

⁴ *Ibid*, Oct. 15, 1914.

and information could be censored.⁵ The editors stated their position bluntly: we can follow the rules of occupation and German censorship and still be patriotic Belgians.⁶

The Germans forced *Le Bien Public* and *L'Ami de L'Order* from Namur (which was not imported into occupied France), to reappear shortly after all Belgian papers were suppressed. For a short time after it reappeared, the newspaper maintained its previous practice of producing three editions a day. It was usually three pages in length, with war and international news on the first page, sometimes spilling over to the second, and then provincial and local information and advertisements on the second and third pages.

Despite being closely monitored by the German censors, and being used by the Germans in occupied France, the *Bien Public*'s publication was often provisional and always uncertain.⁷ In December 1914, the editors of the paper forewarned readers that they were not confident the paper would continue publishing in 1915.⁸ This uncertainty appeared to be a reflection of the editors' mixed sentiments about publishing under German control.

Le Bien Public reported that Belgian journalists who fled to London and were publishing newspapers in exile saw their colleagues who stayed and worked under the Germans as quasi-collaborators.⁹ A historian of the Belgian press during World War I, Jean Massart, described such papers as *Le Bien Public* as "professed" (as opposed to authentic) Belgian newspapers.¹⁰ A lack of by-lines or statement of editors' names suggests its staff did not want their identities known, as some saw them as colleagues of the German authorities.

Such charges must have tried the staff of the newspaper, but they chose to continue

⁵ Ibid., Nov. 1, 1914.

⁶ Ibid., 1915. Interestingly, the editors made this statement after a fifteen-day period when no newspaper appeared in Belgium under German orders.

⁷ Massart, *Belgians under the Germans Eagle*, 15.

⁸ *Le Bien Public*, Dec. 13, 1914.

⁹ Ibid., Dec. 10, 1914.

¹⁰ Massart, *The Secret Press in Belgium*, 78.

working. They described the readers' negative response to the newspaper's initial suspension as a sort of referendum that had deemed *Le Bien Public* indispensable.¹¹

Hence, the newspaper did continue, and for the period that it was available in occupied France, it did so without any further significant suspensions of publication.¹²

Resembling its imported counterpart from Brussels, *La Belgique*, *Le Bien Public* temporarily provided occupied France with more information about the war and international affairs than historians usually believed to have been available. The paper provided official war communiqués, articles on international affairs not directly related to the war, and war and cultural analysis. Even more so than *La Belgique*, the Ghent newspaper provided news from unoccupied France. Indeed, *Le Bien Public* tested the German censors more than other German-approved Belgian papers. It thus had a few articles that probably slipped by German censors alongside blank spaces in the newspaper clearly indicating the work of censors in excising material found objectionable in by occupation authorities.

Official Communiqués & War Analysis

Coverage of military operations in *Le Bien Public* was quite irregular as compared with *La Belgique*. In the beginning of the Ghent newspaper's occupation publication, the majority of war news presented itself as official communiqués printed under the heading of either "War in France and Belgium" or "On the Eastern Front." The German censors did edit Allied communiqués, despite their promise to the readers only to suppress

¹¹ *Le Bien Public*, Dec. 22, 1914.

¹² The Germans suspended *Le Bien Public* for much of April and May 1915, a few months after it was no longer deemed reliable enough to import into occupied France.

articles in their entirety, in order not to provide mutilated news.¹³ Despite this practice, some positive reports from a French perspective did seep in to the newspapers early in the occupation. On November 1, 1914, a Reuters account told of German attacks losing energy in Nieuport and Arras, while also confirming that the Germans had suffered heavy losses, including many wounded and dead. Incongruously, a Wolff dispatch appeared in the same section that day, claiming German attacks south of Nieuport were continuing with success and that had they captured eight machine guns and two hundred British prisoners.¹⁴ Similar to the reporting in *La Belgique*, no mention was made of the Belgian army flooding the area to slow the Germans. Sometimes dispatches from the two sides disagreed with each other, but usually Allied and German communiqués focused on different areas.

Starting in mid-December 1914, newspapers appeared without any war news. These gaps in battle coverage continued into early January 1915. The newspaper staff never included any explanation as to why battle coverage briefly ceased, but difficulties either in attaining communiqués or with German censors were most likely to blame. When the newspaper returned to publishing war news almost daily, it did so in a different format. It switched journalistic styles, providing war news not in the form of communiqués, but as articles under “Political Bulletins” that provided a synthesis of the day’s communiqués. Much like the “This Day in War” articles found in *La Belgique*, these articles, sub-titled “Military Operations” often cited their sources, and frequently offered a comparison of French and German dispatches.¹⁵ These articles even critiqued their sources, noting that after all these weeks reports start sounding alike – what really

¹³ Massart, *Belgians under the German Eagle*, 256.

¹⁴ *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 1, 1914.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Jan. 13, 1915.

do these advances and retreats mean in terms of one side winning the war?¹⁶ Presenting the information in this format gave different weight to different data. When *Le Bien Public* simply printed dispatches, the reader determined what was relevant and what was not. Now, journalists commented on reports, often prefacing them with statements such as, “nothing very salient to report today, only the failure of one small French offensive.”¹⁷ Furthermore, it was less perceptible when *Le Bien Public* omitted news of military operations, because there was always other international news coverage under the “Political Bulletins” headline. This style was short-lived however, and by February 11, 1915, *Le Bien Public* reverted to providing war communiqués, this time under the title, “The War.” This would be the last detailed information on military operations occupied France would receive from this paper, and the last few weeks in February provided little in the way of war news; by the end of February the Germans stopped importing the newspaper. War analysis complemented this haphazard coverage of military operations.

Le Bien Public included at least eight articles of substance providing war analysis during the time the Germans imported it into occupied France. While that was not substantial number for a daily newspaper over four and a half months, these articles are worth mentioning because they appeared in an arena believed to be receiving only a modest amount of news. Very early in the newspaper’s importation into occupied France, a report from the *Times* (presumably the *London Times*) correspondent in Bordeaux compared French General Joffre’s style of leadership to that of Napoleon. Napoleon found a weak spot in his enemy’s army, and attacked using all his force in that one

¹⁶ Ibid., Jan. 13, 1915.

¹⁷ Ibid., Jan. 14, 1915.

position, whereas modern warfare no longer made that strategy viable. Instead, General Joffre focused upon being intimately connected to several positions of combat at the same time, driving rapidly in a car from point to point.¹⁸ The article was quite the feat of German propaganda. It noted that the people of France loved Joffre and perceived him as dynamic, but also stated he had actually done little as of yet to garner such devotion.¹⁹ The article was correct in noting that the people of France loved Joffre, as the people of France saw him as the man who saved France at the Battle of the Marne. However, to state he had done little to garner such devotion was German propaganda; after incorrectly assuming that the main thrust of the attack would come through Alsace and Lorraine, Joffre quickly readjusted his thinking and did indeed work a miracle, halting the Germans at the Battle of the Marne and “effectively killing the modified Schlieffen strategy.”²⁰ Towards the end of that month, the newspaper provided readers with a Marshal von Hindenburg interview, taken from the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, in which he discussed military strategy.²¹

Numerous articles provided a larger perspective of military affairs. An early article speculated how long the war would last based on modern warfare (the journalist assumed the war would be much longer than those of the nineteenth century but did not guess four years).²² By January 1915, *Le Bien Public* had not published any updates from the front for a while, but it did print an article about the economic ramifications of war. It noted that unlike France and Britain, Germany had foreseen the war - and in particular

¹⁸ Ibid., Nov. 4, 1914.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ian Ousby, *The Road to Verdun: World War I's Most Momentous Battle and the Folly of Nationalism* (NY: Doubleday, 2002), 75, 34.

²¹ *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 24, 1914.

²² Ibid., Nov. 17, 1914.

the prolonged fighting – and that this had a profound impact on the countries' agriculture, commerce, and finance.²³ For those unfamiliar with war events, the editors published a long article in January 1915, providing a month-by-month recap of the episodes leading to war and the actual battles fought, from June 28, 1914, until December 31, 1914.²⁴ If this particular issue reached occupied France, the people there must have considered it a treasure trove of information, as news of the last three months of the year had been sporadic. Five days later, the newspaper published a straightforward account of the Triple Alliance's history, including the text of the 1879 Austrian-German treaty.²⁵ The article acknowledged Italy's neutrality, noting that its non-participation in the war was explainable, as the Triple Alliance was purely defensive in character. However, the article noted that the Germans remained quietly expectant that Italy would eventually enter the war on the German side; instead, Italy declared war on Austria on May 20, 1915.²⁶

The newspaper included several articles about the strength of the belligerent fleets (Germans allowed themselves to be referred to as both the belligerents and enemy in certain pieces). In mid-January 1915, *Le Bien Public*'s editors managed to publish an article detailing the potency of the Allied fleets, providing details about the number of ships both the British and French had available for fighting.²⁷ To laymen, the strength of the Allied fleets must have seemed encouraging. Overall, *Le Bien Public* did not provide much coverage of battles and the movement of troops, despite for a time carrying a

²³ Ibid., Jan. 4, 1915.

²⁴ Ibid., Jan. 9, 1915.

²⁵ Ibid., Jan. 31, 1915.

²⁶ The official reason for Italy's war declaration was the Austrian mistreatment of the Italian minority, so the Italian Parliament declared war only on Austria-Hungary, and not Germany. Spencer Di Scala, *Italy: From Revolution to Republic, 1700 to Present* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2009), 207.

²⁷ *Le Bien Public*, January 14, 1915.

recurring article entitled “The French and Belgian Front.” What this newspaper did grant readers in occupied France was a substantial amount of international news outside the immediate confines of the war. It also provided ample discussions of the cultural and political ramifications of the war.

International News & Analysis

International news came most frequently in the form of quick blurbs under the headline, “Political Bulletin.” Much like *La Belgique*, this newspaper provided a wide variety of news about numerous places. For the brief time the Germans imported it into France, *Le Bien Public* did provide a consistent source of international news. While most articles were brief – usually a paragraph – there was regular coverage of world affairs. The importance of places and events the paper discussed appears apparent. The two most important neutral countries from a German perspective, Holland and the United States, received abundant reporting. This focus on Holland, which shared a border with Belgium and was an important source of pre-war goods, and the United States, whose potential entrance into the war was a vital concern, accompanied coverage of politics and opinion in other neutral countries, especially Italy. The newspaper staff frequently reported upon the Allied powers and areas under their influence, such as South Africa, that hinted at the well being of the British Empire. The newspaper provided ample coverage of the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope’s role in the war, not surprising for a professed Catholic newspaper.

Starting early in the newspaper’s censored publication, Holland was a key focus, to the extent that a semi-regular article, “In Holland,” was a frequently-seen sub-title

under “Political Bulletins”. Beginning in late October 1914, readers read about relations with their neighbor to the north that was untouched by invasion. This issue even included a second article “Holland and the War,” which reprinted an official German declaration from M.P.J. Troelstra stating that Germany would not violate Dutch independence.²⁸ A topic naturally discussed was the situation of Belgian refugees in Holland, who numbered in the hundreds of thousands.²⁹ During the German siege of Antwerp in October 1914, approximately one million Belgians fled across the Dutch frontier, increasing the Netherlands population by one-sixth.³⁰ The newspaper did not mention the German soldiers who also sought refuge from the war in Holland. In early November, the paper ran an article that methodically analyzed the economic consequences of the war for Holland and the military measures the war forced it to take.³¹ Dutch neutrality was also thrashed out frequently in the paper. A longer article in November covered this subject, as well as German laws regulating the Dutch-Belgian border, and the implications of Dutch neutrality on Belgian refugees living there.³² This article appeared a few months prior to the Germans, expenditure of huge effort and much money to build a lethal electric fence along three hundred kilometers of the Dutch-Belgian border to disrupt Allied intelligence operations based in Holland (and prevent the escape of Belgians).³³

Two articles discussed the effect of the British blockades on the Dutch and world

²⁸ Ibid., Oct. 30, 1914.

²⁹ Ibid., Nov. 1, 1914. C.R.M.F. Cruttwell, *A History of the Great War 1914-1918*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1991), 128-9. Another article in this same issue was entitled “Dutch Horses,” and discussed how the Queen of Holland had ruled it illegal to export horses. The Dutch government imposed an export prohibition on horses on August 3, 1914, because the cavalry brigade did not have enough horses while at the same time private Dutch citizens sold a large number of horses to Germany. Maartje M. Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral: The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914-1918* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 158-9.

³⁰ Abbenhuis, 35.

³¹ *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 6, 1914 and Nov. 1, 1914.

³² Ibid., Nov. 10, 1914.

³³ Abbenhuis, 35, 164.

economies, including “The Dutch Crisis,” which spoke to the economic hardships faced there due, in part, to the blockade hindering trade.³⁴ As Maartje M. Abbenhuis describes it, during the war Holland felt caught between the devil (Germany) and the great blue sea (ruled by Britain).³⁵ *Le Bien Public* provided news of the hardship caused by the great blue sea, but not the devil. The Dutch government protested against the British blockade measures such as interfering with the rights of neutral citizens to unhindered trade. When such protests achieved little, the Dutch adjusted their trade practices and formed a Commission for Trade, which was on very good terms with Britain.³⁶ The effect of the war on Dutch agriculture was the subject of yet another article that portrayed Holland as suffering along with Belgium.³⁷ The image of Holland struggling in similar fashion to the occupied zones continued into the next year, with the first paragraph under “Political Bulletins” describing censorship in the Dutch press, noting that it did not really affect Dutch newspapers.³⁸ In reality, the Dutch government censored its press, but not universally and never consistently. When the war started, the Dutch government asked newspaper editors to refrain from endangering neutrality by praising or condemning any of the belligerents.³⁹ In February, just a few weeks before occupied France stopped receiving *Le Bien Public*, the paper reported that Holland was mobilizing to armed neutrality.⁴⁰ The report did not state that throughout the war the Dutch feared invasion, especially from the Germans.

³⁴ *Le Bien Public*, Dec. 24, 1914 and Nov. 20, 1914. Short blurbs on the economic ramifications of the war for Holland appeared, including one on January 8, 1915.

³⁵ Abbenhuis, 17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 119-21.

³⁷ *Le Bien Public*, Dec. 3, 1914.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1915.

³⁹ Abbenhuis, 170.

⁴⁰ *Le Bien Public*, Feb. 1, 1915.

The United States, as a rising world power, garnered international attention before the war started. With its declaration of neutrality during the first part of the war, however, both sides were vying for its support, and coverage of events occurring across the sea increased. Even within the short time span occupied Frenchmen had access to *Le Bien Public*, one could see a proliferation of stories focusing on the United States. An early snippet of news told of a bomb exploding in a Bronx courthouse, aimed at a Judge Gibbs who had been doling out harsh sentences.⁴¹ This story seems to have been included merely because of its shocking elements. Most articles about the United States either provided insight into its political climate or focused on the relationship between it and England and potential rifts building between the two.

President Wilson's attitudes towards the war were of such importance that in January 1915, *Le Bien Public* published a two-issue serial on the topic.⁴² Earlier, it had reported upon his official protest in regards to the bombing of open cities.⁴³ The January 21, 1915 issue also included pieces about a proposed amendment to American immigration laws excluding illiterate immigrants from entry to the country, and Senator Lodge's demand for a commission to examine if the United States was sufficiently prepared if it had to enter the war.⁴⁴ The paper provided a few sentences on the Senatorial elections.⁴⁵ Immigration law also received continuing coverage, including when President Wilson utilized his veto power to cut down a bill.⁴⁶ *Le Bien Public* also supplied an examination of America's relations with both Mexico and Argentina.⁴⁷ Most political

⁴¹ Ibid., Nov. 15, 1914.

⁴² Ibid., Jan. 20, 1915 and Jan. 21, 1915.

⁴³ Ibid., Nov. 30, 1914.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Jan. 21, 1915.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Nov. 7, 1914.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Feb. 3, 1915 and Feb. 4, 1915.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Jan. 15, 1915.

articles about the United States, however, focused on whether it would enter the war, including items on American neutrality, the build-up of the American arsenal, including its aerial fleet, weaponry, naval projects (in particular its submarine program) and the Ship Purchase Bill.⁴⁸ The Ship Purchase Bill was Secretary of the Treasury William G. McAddo's attempt to deal with the disruption of shipping that jeopardized American exports. The legislation called for the creation of a government-owned corporation to purchase and operate ships on overseas trade routes. President Wilson supported the legislation but Congress balked at the idea, claiming it was expensive and socialistic. The bill was prepared shortly after the outbreak of war, but had to be introduced to Senate several times, and with numerous modification before passage in May 1916. The final bill limited the existence of the Shipping Board to times of "national emergency."⁴⁹ The Ship Purchase Bill issue revealed the differing political opinions in the United States during the war. Any person in occupied France who was fortunate enough to have read all these issues of *Le Bien Public* would have had a solid understanding of the American political outlook toward the war.

The United States and England enjoyed close ties. Readers discovered in early January that Dr. Hexamer, president of the American Association of University Professors founded that year, had organized meetings protesting the overtly anglophile attitude of the American government.⁵⁰ Various articles concentrated upon the potential of increasing estrangement between the two countries. When the United States protested

⁴⁸ Ibid., Feb. 3, 1915; Feb. 6, 1915; Feb. 19, 1915; Jan. 17, 1915, Jan. 12, 1915, Dec. 18, 1914, Nov. 14, 1914 and Dec. 20, 1914. The Feb. 19, 1915 issue also featured vignettes on American customs (taxes, not culture) and the new railway tax.

⁴⁹ Anne Cipriano Venzon, ed. *The United States in the First World War: An Encyclopedia* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1999), 548-49.

⁵⁰ *Le Bien Public*, Jan. 20, 1915.

British enforcement of their blockade, including the British seizure of leather and olive oil from neutral countries on the grounds that the destination of the products was enemy territory, it received coverage.⁵¹ However, the newspaper also reported upon British assurances sent via their Washington ambassador to the United States that the British navy would not slow down American ships in the search for contraband.⁵² *Le Bien Public* included even petty incidents of strife between the two countries. For example, when a Canadian duck hunter accidentally killed an American duck hunter near Lake Erie in the British dominion of Canada, the very overblown headline in *Le Bien Public* read “Incident on Anglo-American Frontier.”⁵³ It would be an understatement to assert that the newspaper provided detailed coverage of the two countries’ relationship.

Coverage of neutral countries’ internal politics was a stable fixture in this Ghent newspaper. Stories pertaining to Italy were especially prevalent. The Italian earthquake received substantial coverage in both *Le Bien Public* and *La Belgique* because of its enormity. Occurring on January 13, 1915, this major earthquake in the Abruzzi province affected fifty-four communes, leaving 25,000 dead and another 100,000 people homeless.⁵⁴ One of the first articles on Italy to appear in the German-censored *Le Bien Public* was a Wolff report examining Italian neutrality and the internal struggle gripping its politics.⁵⁵ Readers in occupied France were relatively well informed on Italian politics, being able to follow its ministerial crisis and then learn about its new cabinet.⁵⁶ Once this new government emerged, further pieces detailed the nature of the country’s neutrality

⁵¹ Ibid., Nov. 12, 1914 and Jan. 18, 1915.

⁵² Ibid., Dec. 7, 1914.

⁵³ Ibid., Jan. 17, 1915.

⁵⁴ John Dickie, John Foot, and Frank M. Snowden, *Disastro! Disasters in Italy since 1860: Culture, Politics, and Society* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 30. The Italian media portrayed the response to the Abruzzo quake as one of solidarity and military efficiency.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Oct. 30, 1914.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Nov. 7, 1914 and Nov. 9, 1914.

and its military preparedness.⁵⁷ When Italy did enter the war on the side of the Allies on April 26, 1915, (after the French occupied zone stopped receiving *Le Bien Public*) war deeply divided the country.⁵⁸ In early 1915, when occupied France was still receiving this newspaper, the question of intervention was dividing the Italian left, with many socialists being identified by the population as defeatists for their position of neutrality, while many others on the left, including revolutionary socialists like Benito Mussolini supported the war effort.⁵⁹

Articles were also included in the paper focusing on Romanian neutrality, and the Portuguese political crisis and neutrality.⁶⁰ One article quoted Nika Petreanu, a Romanian Professor of law at the University of Louvain. He stated that Romania did not want to become involved in the war, in part because of Russia's bullying tactics in 1878, after the two countries fought together against the Ottoman Empire, taking Plevna by siege.⁶¹ Petreanu continued on to state that not only did Russia's ingratitude push Romania into the Austrian sphere of influence and made him realize the potential dangers Romania faced from Russia if the Austria and Hungary lost the war, but it also made the country not want to enter into war unless its vital interests were endangered.⁶² This article not only implied the untrustworthiness of Russia, from a neutral, but suggested Romania was leaning towards Germany's side. Romania had recently renewed a treaty of alliance with the Central Powers, and its ruler, Ferdinand of Hohenzollern, was

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Dec. 6, 1914; Dec. 30, 1914; Jan. 21, 1915 and Jan. 13, 1914. This fourth article focused upon the sentiments of Italian Catholics towards their country's neutrality.

⁵⁸ Tucker, *The European Powers in the First World War: An Encyclopedia*, 374, 439.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 374.

⁶⁰ *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 24, 1914; Nov. 27, 1914; Jan. 31, 1915 and Feb. 1, 1915.

⁶¹ After the war, the Russians ignored the Russo-Romanian military convention, and continued to traverse Romanian territory and even threatened to disarm Romanian troops in the area. Călin Hentea, *Brief Romanian Military History* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 106-107.

⁶² *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 24, 1914.

a member of the same royal family as Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II. Despite these ties, Romania entered the war against Germany in June 1916, after Russia promised to back Romanian claims to predominantly Romanian-inhabited Transylvania, the Banat, and Southern Bukovina.⁶³ Coverage of the Portuguese struggle with neutrality did note that Portugal already had a treaty with Britain, and focused upon Portugal's hesitation to enter the war, rather than suggesting it might do so on the German side.⁶⁴ Germany declared war on Portugal after *Le Bien Public* was no longer available in the French occupied cities, in March 1916, after Lisbon agreed to the British request to seize German vessels detained in Portuguese ports.⁶⁵

In one issue alone, the paper carried brief blurbs under the heading "Political Bulletin," giving updates on Swiss, Italian, Romanian, and Bulgarian neutrality.⁶⁶ In December 1914 and January 1915, articles entitled "The Role of Neutrals" and "Neutrals and the War" provided an overview of their role in the war.⁶⁷ One of their roles was to act as intermediaries, as did two Swiss delegates when they visited and reported upon prisoner of war camps in both France and Germany.⁶⁸ Readers in occupied France who had the chance to read this paper were knowledgeable and up to date on the position of many neutral powers up until February 1915.

⁶³ Robert Bideieux and Ian Jeffries. *A History of Eastern Europe: Crisis and Change* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 126.

⁶⁴ *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 27, 1914.

⁶⁵ David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 92.

⁶⁶ *Le Bien Public*, Feb. 2, 1915.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Dec. 8, 1914 and Jan. 5, 1915.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Dec. 14, 1914.

Coverage of the English home front, as well as those of her dominions, was extensive in *Le Bien Public*.⁶⁹ Considering the role of the German censors, it was not surprising that most of these stories painted the Allied countries in a bad light. The South African riots received extensive coverage, demonstrating the volatility of one of England's most important spheres of influence.⁷⁰ The Union of South Africa supported the British war effort, but Prime Minister Botha underestimated Afrikaner resistance to fighting for the British, as they remembered the destruction and harsh concentration camps the British utilized during the Boer War, as well as Germany's support for the Afrikaners during that war.⁷¹ The riots were apart of a larger Afrikaner uprising partly directed against military service for the empire.⁷² The insurrection in Egypt also received coverage, as did a bomb explosion in a police station in Calcutta, India.⁷³ A short blurb told about the uprising in the British protectorate of Nyasaland (now Malawi) when a few tribesmen revolted against British colonialists stationed there.⁷⁴ Reports on England proper focused on its domestic woes caused by the war, such as its faltering economic health. Two articles but ten days apart told readers in late autumn of 1914 that despite taxes having been raised on several items, including beer and income, the British still needed a loan from the treasury to pay for the war.⁷⁵ Troubles with coal production in Yorkshire received treatment, as did the looming menace of strikes, and the sharp increase in overall prices across England.⁷⁶ A British economic story particularly

⁶⁹ The newspaper's reporting on France, both the occupied and unoccupied zones, will be dealt with separately in the following section of this chapter.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Nov. 1, 1914; Nov. 2, 1914; Nov. 3, 1914 and Nov. 7, 1914

⁷¹ Tucker, *The European Powers in the First World War: An Encyclopedia*, 654.

⁷² Stevenson, 164.

⁷³ *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 6, 1914 and Nov. 29, 1914.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Feb. 9, 1915.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Nov. 20, 1914 and Nov. 30, 1914.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Jan. 19, 1915; Feb. 7, 1915 and Feb. 9, 1915.

germane for Belgian readers appeared in the last issue of 1914, entitled “The Problem of Refugees in England.” It reported that Belgian refugees in England were having a difficult time procuring jobs, as employers judged that hiring them would undermine the indigenous workforce.⁷⁷ A German proclamation, uncharacteristically in the lead position, claimed the British were taking severe measures against German and Austrian residents in their country.⁷⁸ Perhaps the German authorities encouraged the newspaper’s editors to lead with this story because it was true. On August 5, 1914, Parliament passed into law the Alien Restrictions Bill as an emergency measure, giving the Home Secretary total control over all aliens, requiring aliens to reside and remain within certain parts of the country, and enabling their deportation without trial.⁷⁹ The Alien Restrictions Bill made German and Austrian nationals extremely vulnerable in Britain, as the British government utilized this legislation to expel and intern the majority of Germans in Britain by the end of the war.⁸⁰ Of the approximately 75,000 people classified as enemy aliens during the war, the British government interned roughly 32,000 and repatriated 20,000.⁸¹

As a professed Roman Catholic newspaper, *Le Bien Public* provided Catholic occupied France with some coverage of Vatican affairs. Twenty-one days after its occurrence, the newspaper covered the death of Cardinal Ferrata, the former papal *nuncio* to Belgium and France.⁸² By mid-November, the newspaper was running stories under the title, “The Pope and the War.”⁸³ The second article under this title paraphrased Pope

⁷⁷ Ibid., Dec. 31, 1914.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Nov. 9, 1914.

⁷⁹ Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide* (New York: Frank Cass, 2001), 44.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 45.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 1, 1914. Cardinal Ferrata spent the bulk of his career working in the diplomatic service of the Holy See, and two of his early postings upon being made a bishop were as *nuncio* in Belgium and France before being elevated to Cardinal by Pope Leo XIII in 1896.

⁸³ The first appeared in the Nov. 19, 1914 edition.

Benedict XV's telegram stating Vatican neutrality.⁸⁴ The Vatican stance was actually one of absolute impartiality, which, as opposed to neutrality, forbade public moral determinations.⁸⁵ It was certainly good propaganda for the German authorities to tell Catholic Belgians that their religious leader was not taking sides. Three weeks later, the newspaper published two articles about his encyclical letter relating to the war.⁸⁶ *Ad beatissimi apostolorum* appealed in a loving tone to both sides, stating that the ruling states had ceased to observe Christian wisdom leading to the war and beseeching both sides to find some other means of resolving their differences.⁸⁷ Readers also read of the Pope's pleas for a Christmas truce, before both sides ultimately rejected the idea.⁸⁸ Two days before Christmas *Le Bien Public* published both a letter from Pope Benedict to Cardinal Mercier (Archbishop of Malines who opposed the deportation of unemployed Belgian men to Germany), and an article about the religious spirit in internment camps.⁸⁹ The January 2, 1915, edition of the paper discussed the Vatican's relationship with France.⁹⁰ Discussing the gradual weakening of Church influence in France was discrete propaganda aimed at the still religious Belgians.⁹¹ In a later issue, a paragraph of the paper examined the Vatican's relationship with the Quirinal (the Italian civilian

⁸⁴ Ibid., Nov.20, 1914.

⁸⁵ Charles R. Gallagher, "The Perils of Perception: British Catholics and Papal Neutrality, 1914-1923," in *The Papacy Since 1500: From Italian Prince to Universal Pastor*, James Corkery and Thomas Worcester, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010),169.

⁸⁶ *Le Bien Public*, Dec. 10, 1914 and Dec. 13, 1914. An encyclical letter is a formal letter sent by the Pope to all Catholics stating the official position of the Catholic Church on a certain topic.

⁸⁷ Joe Holland, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: The Popes Confront the Industrial Age, 1760-1958* (Rome: Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs, 2003), 241. Frank J. Coppa, *Politics and the Papacy in the Modern World* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008), 136.

⁸⁸ *Le Bien Public*, Dec. 15, 1914. Another article in this same edition reported that a few members of the American Senate had also requested a twenty-day Christmas cease-fire.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Dec. 22, 1914.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Jan. 2, 1915.

⁹¹ The broadening of suffrage in the later part of the nineteenth century brought anticlerical forces to power that led to the weakening of Church power, which included the secularization of education in 1882 and the complete separation of Church and state in 1905. Richard P. McBrien, Ed. *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 538.

government).⁹² Another article recounted the Pope's visit to those injured in the Italian earthquake and the comfort he provided them.⁹³

The newspaper provided religious coverage in broader terms beyond the Vatican as a political entity. Mid-way through the period of the paper's importation into occupied France a regular feature entitled "Press Review" provided an editorial section to the newspaper. One article placed the blame for the war on the Catholic Church for not forbidding Catholic Austria from starting the war (somewhat ignoring the realities of Church power in the twentieth century).⁹⁴ A later "Press Review" lauded the revival of religious sentiment throughout Catholic Europe, noting the comfort it was bringing people during trying times.⁹⁵ One piece, "The Mysterious Law," questioned why God was not intervening to end the suffering caused by the war, with the author's answer that the natural state of man is to work and suffer⁹⁶

Some international news pieces appear to be included purely for their inherent interest. No less than fourteen issues of the paper mentioned the erupting Mexican civil war. Two articles talked of Noble Peace Prize winners, one piece confirmed that Mount Vesuvius was becoming active, while additional pieces discussed South American unrest that only marginally could have an impact on the European war. *Le Bien Public* provided a wide array of international news coverage. If a small amount of that information managed to filter into occupied France, then from October 1914 till February 1915, the area received more world news than is usually recognized.

⁹² *Le Bien Public*, Jan. 18, 1915.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, Jan. 23, 1915.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1915.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Jan. 9, 1915.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Nov. 14, 1914.

Le Bien Public extensively covered the international pacifist movement, with at least six articles devoted to the topic, not counting those pertaining to the Pope's attempts to broker a peace. At first readers learned that it was not a very large movement, but the reporting continued.⁹⁷ Most of these articles provided little to revitalize hopes for peace, and one article explained that, while there was a widespread desire for peace, the flood of violence spread across Europe for profound reasons and could not end until something was achieved.⁹⁸ *Le Bien Public* reached back to peace conferences held at The Hague in 1899 and 1907, noting that the general public knew little about the results, which were supposed to help avoid such a war.⁹⁹ The newspaper even discussed the concept of pacifism at an academic level, as one article provided the opinion of Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard University from 1869-1909, that a federation of European states was the only way to ensure peace.¹⁰⁰ It is interesting that the peace movement received this much coverage, as one editorial in *Le Bien Public* called it an "inopportune controversy," and opined that this was not the time to undermine the German war effort by talking about peace.¹⁰¹ Other broad, war-related, topics discussed in the newspaper included the role of women in the war, the effects of so many deaths on the family structure, and the relationship between war and art. Articles that analyzed international trends offered substantial discussions of the effects and nature of war that would later be lacking in news received in occupied France, even examining loftier topics such as human progress and the war.

⁹⁷ Ibid., Nov. 4, 1914.

⁹⁸ Ibid., Nov. 26, 1914. This article quoted statements made by a René Vauthier at The Hague.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Dec. 2, 1914 and Feb. 7, 1915.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Jan. 29, 1915. Charles W. Eliot transformed Harvard from a college to a modern research university. During the war his opinion on American public affairs was widely respected.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Nov. 15, 1914.

News about France

As we noted, history remembers occupied France as starved for news from the rest of the country. As Deborah Buffton states in her dissertation, people living in occupied France compared their nutritional deprivation to their knowledge deprivation.¹⁰² Hence, the news about France they did receive from *Le Bien Public* must have been welcome, even though it frequently focused on France's woes. At least fourteen articles reported on news from unoccupied French unrelated to the battlefield. Readers learned that three German airplanes flew over Paris, and that a German zeppelin dropped six bombs on Paris in late October, killing eight people and injuring many more.¹⁰³ However, *Le Bien Public* relayed the French government's return to Paris from Bordeaux with no trace of propaganda inserted into the stories. A story on President Poincaré's return to Paris was followed three issues later with a blurb stating the next session would start sometime between December 15th and 20th, and that the Parliament was going to limit voting to money bills and laws indispensable to the war and national life.¹⁰⁴ Coverage of parliamentary activity continued into the next year, when in February readers were informed of the nine topics Parliament intended to focus upon in the new session, including road construction in various areas of France, limits on the number of treasury bonds issued, passing a law forbidding trade with Germans, and limiting the sale of absinthe.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Buffton, 107.

¹⁰³ *Le Bien Public*, N.315, Nov. 11, 1915 and Nov. 1, 1915.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Dec. 15, 1914 and Dec. 18, 1914.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 2, 1915.

Most of the stories spotlighted France's social and economic afflictions. A lengthy article ran in the end of November, simply titled "In French Industry." Citing the *Petit Parisien* as its source, it stated that stagnation had gripped the country, as the army had taken all able-bodied men, forcing businesses to close and placing both the young and old on welfare. It was true that mobilization and the war brought industrial activity effectively to a halt, as most firms retained on average only one-third of their pre-1914 workforce.¹⁰⁶ However, as the military front stabilized, the French state authorized industrialists to recall mobilized essential workers.¹⁰⁷ Especially important to readers in the occupied zone, *Le Bien Public* continued on to reveal concerns about the large number of Belgian and French refugees flooding Paris and the surrounding areas, accentuating economic problems. The French government was asking female refugees to work a few hours a week making clothes for the wounded and children.¹⁰⁸ Political angst was also fair grist for *Le Bien Public*. Without providing much detail or context, it reported that some members of parliament and journalists had joined forces under Clemenceau to name a commission to present to the prime minister a protest against the illegal manner in which he was censoring of the news.¹⁰⁹ The newspaper covered social issues, such as the falling French birthrate.¹¹⁰ The birthrate story warned it would take generations to make up for war losses if families continued to limit the number of children they had. If the French government did not make changes soon, the undesirable

¹⁰⁶ Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau, and Becker, 61.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 61-2. Later, in June 1915, the Dalbiez Law enabled the demobilization of half a million industrial workers, and this social group suffered proportionally fewer casualties at the front than agricultural workers or men from the middle class.

¹⁰⁸ *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 30, 1914.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Dec. 22, 1914.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Feb. 19, 1915.

action of bringing foreigners in to help France recover its position would be necessary.¹¹¹

The paper reported that the French government attempted to deal with the crisis by enacting laws to punish single people and to favor large families. This statement represented an interpretation of two laws passed in France. In January 1914, the new family allowance act recognized large families as a special category of poor, which deserved more money because of childcare costs. The law granted aid in the form of an allowance to fathers or lone mothers who had three children or more between the ages of three and thirteen.¹¹² In July 1914, France graduated income tax contributions according to family size.¹¹³ Related to this, another blurb noted that some in the French government feared the French national *esprit* was waning, and the naturalization law of 1889 had to be modified to ensure the country's identity.¹¹⁴ In the last issue potentially received in occupied France, it reported that Senator Bérenger wanted a law banning all foreigners from French military service and wanted those already in the service recalled.¹¹⁵

Immigrant manual laborers were an important part of France's population, even before the war; in 1914, Paris ranked as the first European capital in its proportion of foreign residents.¹¹⁶ Before the war, these immigrants mainly came from Germany, and to a lesser extent, other central and Eastern European countries. As the war caused the reconstitution of this labor force, Belgians, Italians, Spaniards, Greeks, and colonial

¹¹¹ *Le Bien Public*, Feb. 19, 1915.

¹¹² Maria Sophia Quine, *Population Politics in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 72.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 73. In July 1917 France further altered its tax code to allow reductions in property taxes for dependents.

¹¹⁴ *Le Bien Public*, Dec. 29, 1914.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 28, 1915.

¹¹⁶ Jean-Louis Robert, "The Parisian Strikes (August 1914-1919)," in *Strikes, Social Conflict and the First World War*, Leopold Haimson and Giulio Sapellis, eds. (Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 1992), 33.

workers replaced these workers from now-enemy countries.¹¹⁷ These stories suggested that the rest of France was changing for the worse during the Nord's separation from it.

Occupied France felt isolated from the rest of the world, the rest of France, and even internally as villages and towns felt detached from one another. These sentiments were based in reality. Occupation authorities restricted or forbade travel between areas. Such policies isolated citizens of occupied locales from all but their immediate areas, while censorship deprived them of most news from the outside world, making information scarce, and rumor indistinguishable from fact.¹¹⁸ In this atmosphere, *Le Bien Public* might even have provided information about occupied France to people within its boundaries. With the battlefield literally being entrenched within the Nord, daily reports of skirmishes were local news. Furthermore, an article in *Le Bien Public* allowed residents of occupied France a chance to gauge the problems their conquest posed for the nation. An assessment of the occupied territories, taken from the *Petit Parisien*, let people know that 3.25 million were in the occupied zone, and placed a monetary value on the lost area at 9,500,000,000 francs.¹¹⁹ Indeed, the industrial production of the Département du Nord was valued at four billion francs annually before the war.¹²⁰ Two other articles provided information perhaps not known outside the Lille area. A short article in the last column of the front page of the November 19 issue, quoting the *Nord Maritime*, reported the Germans had not allowed anybody to enter or leave Lille since October 13.¹²¹ A much longer article in early December extolled the *Bulletin de Lille* as providing details of the city's occupation, with an accurate assessment of the use of hostages and the amount of

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹¹⁸ Buffton, 39.

¹¹⁹ *Le Bien Public*, Dec. 27, 1914.

¹²⁰ Gibbons, 198.

¹²¹ *Le Bien Public*, Nov.19, 1914.

food available.¹²² Such praise for that mainstay of German authority, *Bulletin de Lille*, must have been a bitter pill to readers in occupied France.

Censorship in *Le Bien Public*

All of the German-authorized newspapers, whether originating in Belgium or France, were supposed to provide a view of life as the Germans wished people under their control to interpret it.¹²³ *Le Bien Public*'s publishing staff did not always put forward the world image the Germans wanted, and hence occupation authorities frequently censored the paper. The censors went as far as suspending *le Bien Public* for all of May 1915 (after it was no longer available in occupied France) over its practice of publishing Allied communiqués relatively unaltered.¹²⁴ At the outset of German control, the censors allowed the newspaper to leave a blank space in the place of the deleted portion.¹²⁵ The result in *Le Bien Public* was a lot of blank space. The first incident of blank space occurred on the second page of the fifth issue produced under German supervision.¹²⁶ Two issues later, censors deleted a paragraph from an article "On the Eastern Front."¹²⁷ By the next issue a great deal of the first page was blank: the lead article had been censored, as well as a British communiqué; missing too was a large portion of a report on the Japanese attack of Tsingtau, and another section whose topic is not identifiable.¹²⁸ The attack on Tsingtau was most likely a difficult topic for German censors. Japan, aligned with the British, demonstrated its expansionist plans in China, a

¹²² Ibid., Dec. 8, 1914.

¹²³ Buffton, 4.

¹²⁴ Massart, 256.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 258.

¹²⁶ *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 1, 1914.

¹²⁷ Ibid., Nov.3, 1914.

¹²⁸ Ibid., Nov.14, 1914.

tendency German propaganda writers could utilize to their advantage. However, with the capture of the Port of Tsingtau the Japanese established themselves in the Shantung Province, pushing out the Germans, who used to control the region.¹²⁹ By early December, these blank spots disappeared. Perhaps this change reflected the editors' recognition of what the Germans would censor. The editors wrote in one article, "We have no illusions – we know what subjects will not escape the censors' pens."¹³⁰ More likely, the Germans reversed their decision to allow evidence of their censorship, demanding the paper's staff rework page layouts to hide the deletion of items. Either way, people in occupied France no longer were able to tell which stories the Germans censored.

Despite the heavy hand of censorship, a few articles were included that seemed to escape the censors' attention. In the second issue, an article entitled "Prudence," reported that German soldiers in Belgium were frequently ending up drunk, because Belgian alcohol was much stronger than the German variety, and they were not accustomed to it.¹³¹ The article made the German soldiers sound clownish at the same time the French were being told they had to salute the occupiers. Shocking was an article about the wireless telegraph station at the Eiffel Tower. It explained in detail how during the night its news broadcast could reach a distance of 5,000-6,000km and during the day 3,000-4,000km.¹³² Considering the ban on outside news sources, and the fact that those very broadcasts would be the central source of news for the main clandestine press, *La*

¹²⁹ Raymond A. Bawal, Jr. *Titans of the Rising Sun: The Rise and Fall of Japan's Yamato Class Battleships* (Clinton Township, MI: Inland Expressions, 2010), 26-27.

¹³⁰ *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 25, 1914. "Nous ne nous illusionnons pas au point de supposer que notre prose, s'exerçant sur de tels sujets, échappe au crayon de censeur."

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, Oct. 15, 1914.

¹³² *Ibid.*, Jan. 25, 1915.

Patience, not censoring this story was odd, even if few individuals had receivers. Other reports, telling of economic hardships in Germany and reverses in German-held colonies seem like the type of news a censor would consider deleting. One piece informed readers that a British warship torpedoed a German submarine, and painted the picture of the Germans waving a white flag as they sank.¹³³ As Deborah Buffton noted about the *Gazette des Ardennes*¹³⁴, two voices coexisted in *Le Bien Public* despite German control. That second, a Belgian voice, must have been welcomed in the Nord.

Conclusion

The ability of *Le Bien Public* editors to test, and occasionally exceed, the limits of German news control must have been evident to readers in occupied France. Compared to newspapers produced in German-controlled France, it provided extensive coverage of both the battlefronts and the world at large. The *Bulletin de Lille* and *Bulletin de Roubaix* provided almost no coverage outside local affairs. *La Gazette des Ardennes* did include war coverage but more heavily censored it. The German voice was the dominant one in these papers – in *Le Bien Public* it was often the quieter of the two voices. Of course, the end-result was that the Germans stopped importing the paper into occupied France. It is interesting that the Germans chose to briefly import these two newspapers to occupied France, as within Belgium, the Germans did not allow either newspaper to be distributed beyond its province.¹³⁵

Readers of *La Belgique* and *Le Bien Public* in France were also certain to notice the different tone the Germans took with the Belgians. The less-authoritarian tone in

¹³³ Ibid., Nov.26, 1914.

¹³⁴ Buffton, 267.

¹³⁵ Amara and Roland, 87.

these French-language newspapers should not be associated with Governor Baron von Bissing's statement, "I am of the opinion that a squeezed lemon has no value and that a dead cow will give no milk."¹³⁶ The German authorities saw some Belgians as potential future members of the German empire in a way they rarely saw the French, but they were not the French-speaking Belgians. The German policy of *Flamenpolitik* encouraged the German occupiers to court Flemish leaders and exploit their pre-existing quarrels with the French-speaking Walloons to split Belgian loyalties, with the ultimate aim eventually being Belgium as a Flemish state under German rule.¹³⁷ *Le Bien Public* did not begin with German notices and threats. Rather, they were located in the middle of the first page, or sometimes on the second, without a blaring headline, and sometimes even sound like a request rather than a threat. This did not mean the Belgians suffered any less than the French under German occupation, although readers of these newspapers may have drawn that conclusion.

History did not record which issues of the paper made it in to occupied France between October 14, 1914, and February 28, 1915, so one cannot say for certain what exact information people received. What can be asserted is that during this time the residents of occupied France did receive a greater amount of war and international news than they would at any other time during occupation. They would also have insight into Germany's occupation of Belgium, revealing people suffering under requisitions, scarcity of necessities, and living in general terror. However, this newspaper may have misled readers in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing to believe that perhaps the Belgians did not

¹³⁶ Gilbert, 172.

¹³⁷ Zuckerman, 78, 166, 198. This policy enjoyed no success, as Flemish antagonism towards French culture did not mean a lack of patriotic feelings towards Belgium or a willingness to become a German satellite.

suffer all the indignities they knew in their daily lives. While this news was a brief portal providing a connection with the rest of the world, it also may have painfully reminded the people of occupied France of their isolation.

Chapter Nine:

German Imported Belgian Papers 3:

Le Bruxellois

In the July 10, 1915, issue of *Le Bruxellois*, the editors extended a fraternal welcome to readers in northern France, as the Germans began allowing its importation to Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing.¹ The German's advertised *Le Bruxellois* alongside the *Gazette des Ardennes* in locally-produced French newspapers, such as the *Bulletin de Roubaix*. Before *Le Bruxellois*'s appearance, readers in the tri-city area of occupied France had not received news from a Belgian source since February 1915, when the German occupiers deemed two other newspapers under their control, *Le Bien Public* and *La Belgique* as too uncontrollable to continue as a tool in the occupation of northern France.

Le Bruxellois posed no similar problems to the Germans. *Le Bruxellois* was a collaborationist newspaper. The editors made a great show of impartiality in their presentation of war news and in claiming their independence in relation to the German occupying government. Despite these claims, the editors of the paper propagated the German position on almost every topic. An example can be seen in an early lead story, signed simply TONY, on Italian neutrality. The writer states in the article that Italy remained neutral on the pretext that Austria attacked Serbia and that the Triple Alliance required Italian involvement only in a defensive war.² The author, however, implied that Austria was not an aggressor in the war. Such assertions reflected the views of the German occupiers and were a central feature of this newspaper.

¹ *Le Bruxellois*, July 10, 1915.

² *Ibid.*, July 26, 1915.

Even though the newspaper's staff distorted information with a German viewpoint, they did provide important news to occupied France. Unlike several of the other sources of information available, there were no glaring gaps in news in terms of follow-up. In many newspapers, like the *Gazette des Ardennes*, an important story could be mentioned one day, with no follow-up forthcoming. However, even deprived of news, the people of occupied France remained aloof from this publication.³ Hence, it is difficult to know how many people in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing read *Le Bruxellois*. History recorded that the paper did reach these cities. However, nobody in occupied France believed it was an unbiased paper. One man who lived in Roubaix until January 1917 noted that the only war news available was from the "German" newspaper, *Le Bruxellois*.⁴ People could pay to place information in the newspaper, in a manner similar to modern classified advertisements, and people from occupied France placed such advertisements, as did people from other areas to reach people in northern France. In one issue, a man named Victor Rider wanted to tell his wife, living in the Lille area that he was in good health in a prisoner of war camp in Staumohle, Germany.⁵ Starting in August 1915, advertisements from Lille-area stores also appeared in *Le Bruxellois*. Advertisements from occupied France slowly stopped appearing in the pages of the newspaper, however, perhaps an indicator of the unpopularity of the newspaper, the difficulties in placing advertisements in a foreign newspaper, or the dwindling availability of the newspaper.

For the most part, *Le Bruxellois* provided readers with information concerning the same happenings that people in other parts of Europe learned about from their

³ Jean-Paul Visse, *La presse du nord et du Pas-de-Calais au temps de l'Écho du Nord: 1819-1944*, 197.

⁴ *Journal des réfugiés du Nord*, February 21, 1917.

⁵ *Le Bruxellois*, August 27-28, 1915.

newspapers. The difference was in emphasis: this German-controlled newspaper emphasized some news while devaluing (or at times even ignoring) other items. This chapter analyzes this German “emphasis” as it affected different categories of the news available in *Le Bruxellois*.⁶ First, we examine the communiqués and battle news with special attention placed on the newspaper editors’ coverage of Verdun, the Somme, and Gallipoli. Next, we will provide an overview of news demonstrating German successes and greatness, with two prominent subcategories being their submarine and aerial exploits. The next category reviews the great volume of information categorized as stories revealing domestic problems of the Entente powers, and the inherent evil of these countries. A final category of information that we analyze looks at stories promoting pacifism and demonstrating the evil nature of war. Before the news available to readers in occupied France from this paper can be examined, however, it is worthwhile to discuss the format of the newspaper and share what little is known about its publishing.⁷

Publishing the Newspaper

Le Bruxellois began publishing in September 1915 and continued until the liberation of Brussels in November 1918. Despite the fact it was the Belgian newspaper most under German control, in its initial issue, *Le Bruxellois*’ editors described the new

⁶ It is important to note that this examination reviews *Le Bruxellois* with an eye to what news it provided the readers of occupied France, as opposed to those in Belgium. While the audience does not change the content of the newspaper, it does alter what information I chose to focus upon. For example, this chapter does not discuss the frequent criticism of the Belgian government or discussions of Belgium’s linguistic tensions.

⁷ A brief note on which issues of the newspaper I examined for this chapter is in order. Until July 1918, two issues of the newspaper appeared daily, after which only one issue appeared daily. During the time that two issues appeared, I consulted the main, morning edition. From mid-June 1917 until the newspaper editors moved to one issue, the archives I consulted contained mostly issues of the second, evening newspaper. While there was a great deal of overlap between the two issues, I contained my remarks to the section of the newspaper entitled “Latest New Releases: Reproduced from the Preceding Edition” to make certain not to exaggerate the information reaching occupied France.

paper as edited and administered by Belgians for Belgians, and as an organ “worthy of its name.”⁸ It claimed that German censors wanted to review issues before publication, but that such demands by the Germans were logical in time of war.⁹ In the issue celebrating the newspaper’s one-year anniversary, an article described how two Belgian journalists founded the paper to restore to national life an open forum for the aspirations of the public.¹⁰ This statement is very suspect. For this paper to achieve its mandate of influencing the people it had to appear to be a Belgian paper, hence its German ownership was a secret. At the time, people believed a Herr Rosenfeld of the German civil administration most likely owned it.¹¹ Very little information is available about Rosenfeld. It is suggestive that his name is similar to that of Herman Hugo Rosenbaum, a German expatriate, originally from Hamburg who lived in Brussels for many years before the war.¹² Andreas Laska described Rosenbaum as the editor of *Le Bruxellois*, but until January 19, 1917, the front page proclaimed Marc de Salm as its editor. This was the pseudonym of François Belvaux, a former journalist of the *Patriote* newspaper.¹³ The *Patriote* was the most influential Catholic journal in Belgium before the war and it stopped publication with the occupation. While de Salm (as he will be referred to in this chapter) may have taken pains to hide his identity, he never tried to hide his Germanophile sympathies.¹⁴ Unlike most of the newspaper editors still working under German occupation, this editor was not doing his job against his better judgment. From

⁸ “un organe digne de son nom.” *Le Bruxellois*, September 18, 1914.

⁹ *Ibid.*, September 18, 1914.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, September 17-18, 1915.

¹¹ *Poverty Bay Herald*, (Gisborne, New Zealand), November 15, 1918.

¹² Laska, 123.

¹³ Michaël Amara and Hubert Roland, *Gouverner en Belgique occupée: Oscar von der Lancken-Wakenitz, - Rapports d’activité 1915-1918* (Brussels: P.I.E. – Peter Lang, 2004), 77. In *La presse du Nord*, Visse states Belvaux’s first name is Henri, 197.

¹⁴ Visse, “*La press à Lille*,” 7.

January 1917 on, the newspaper stated that René Armand was its editor, however, Marc de Salm frequently wrote the lead story in the paper, continuing up until its very last issue. Even as Germany was evacuating Brussels, Marc de Salm defended the occupiers' utilization of Belgian goods as legitimate during a time of war, and worried what would happen when the Entente soldiers got their "claws" into Belgian territory.¹⁵ The editors oversaw a staff of professional journalists, unlike many other newspapers in the occupied zones whose staff included people whose key qualification was a willingness to work for the Germans.

The newspaper began by printing 69,000 copies daily, quickly increasing to 75,000 copies daily, until late September 1916, when it increased production to 90,000 copies of the newspaper a day. In November 1917, the number of copies produced daily increased again, this time to 125,000.¹⁶ For readers in Brussels, *Le Bruxellois* cost five centimes until a price hike to ten centimes on October 24, 1917. The newspaper's staff, with a rather self-congratulatory note, stated they were keeping true to their principles, with only a five centimes rise in price per issue.¹⁷ This sounded a lot better than stating they were doubling the price of the newspaper. By July 1918, the price reached fifteen centimes. For international readers (namely readers in occupied France) the price for a three-month subscription was roughly double the domestic price, at 8.5 francs before the 1917 price hike. Interestingly, the subscription rate went down in 1917 because of an increase in advertising rates.¹⁸ Advertisements in other newspapers available in occupied France suggest that *Le Bruxellois* was available for sale at newsstands, but at what price

¹⁵ *Le Bruxellois*, October 15, 1918.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, November 3, 1917. The newspaper's staff reported how many issues they printed per day, but did not explain how many of issues of the two daily editions they printed.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, October 24, 1917.

¹⁸ Visse, *La presse du nord et du Pas-de-Calais*, 6.

is unclear. The newspaper informed readers at the beginning of March 1917 that to allow for enough room for information, serials and small announcements (comparable to modern classified advertisements) would not appear on Mondays in the first edition.¹⁹ By the summer of 1918, readers could most likely tell that the newspaper was facing difficult times. In July, the paper underwent a format change. Instead of publishing two issues daily, the staff produced one paper a day. Four times a week, it was a four-page newspaper; and three times a week was two pages in length.

Format of the Newspaper

Le Bruxellois looked somewhat different from the other newspaper available in occupied France. The newspaper was sixteen by twenty-two inches, with news presented in five columns. The paper usually began with a lead story, followed by communiqués and then “latest news,” and “foreign news.” What made this newspaper look slightly different was that from the fall of 1915 on, the newspaper frequently contained banner headlines. The banner usually drew attention to the first story under “latest news,” such as in the September 23-25, 1915, issue, which told of general mobilization in Bulgaria.²⁰ These blazing headlines mostly told of news that was good for the German cause, such as Bulgaria entering the war on their side. The presence of such headlines did not necessarily mean then newspaper was about to provide a great deal of information on the topic; often, only a paragraph of information followed a banner headline. This gave this newspaper a different look and feel as compared to the other newspapers in the occupied zone.

¹⁹ *Le Bruxellois*, March 1-2, 1917.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, September 23-24, 1915.

This newspaper also felt quite different from German-controlled papers produced in France because of the positioning of German ordinances and demands. Like the *Bulletin de Lille* and *Bulletin de Roubaix*, this newspaper did carry notices from the German occupiers, but the notices' frequency and placement in the newspaper differed, also contributing to the dissimilar look of the newspapers. Commands from the Germans appeared in the Belgian paper on average once or twice a week and these directives were not only worded less harshly than in the French German-controlled newspapers, but did not carry the same blaring titles. For example, one German order in *Le Bruxellois* related to registering horses and cattle provided polite reassurances that the census was not going to lead to confiscation for military purposes, but was intended to make sure that the area conserved its resources.²¹ Even when somebody stabbed a German soldier to death and the Germans believed that they knew the hometown of the suspect, the German notice offered a reward for information, rather than threatening the entire populace of the suspects' town.²² After Bulgaria entered the war against Germany, a notice in the newspaper "invited" Bulgarian subjects in Brussels to please bring their papers to German authorities, all in a very friendly tone.²³ One interesting German notice did not announce any rules or orders, but instead informed readers that the British enslaved Belgian refugees, forcing them to work in factories making munitions or sending them to plantations in India.²⁴ Few studies mention the plight of Belgian refugees in Britain. However, it appears that the refugees' class and status determined the British treatment of

²¹ *Le Bruxellois*, January 14-15, 1916.

²² *Ibid.*, April 28-29, 1916.

²³ *Ibid.*, March 3-4, 1917.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, December 12-13, 1916.

Belgian refugees, with poorer Belgians facing the greatest animosity, which at times degenerated into violence.²⁵

Communiqués and Battle Coverage

From the first issue, the editors made a great show of their impartiality when presenting war news. The newspaper published official communiqués of all the belligerents in a relatively timely manner, with Entente communiqués almost as up to date as the German ones, if a day or two later in some cases. For most of the first year of the paper's publication, the editors did not publish French communiqués with the same regularity as German communiqués and when they were published, they were often only a few lines long. The newspaper offered an explanation within its pages, claiming that the French were putting out hardly any communiqués.²⁶ This of course was a fabrication. By the summer of 1915, the newspaper had begun to publish complete versions of the French reports, often with little censorship. The editors most likely picked the communiqués they shared with care, to only allow smaller Entente victories to reach their readers. Hence, communiqués were similar to those in the *Gazette des Ardennes*. One small difference is that in this newspaper German and Austro-Hungarian communiqués identified each battle by providing a sub-title, stating the Entente general who led the fight.

The German and Austro-Hungarian communiqués frequently told of British, French, and Italian failures, often making their enemies look like failed aggressors. The July 12, 1915, issue of the newspaper provided an example of this trend, with a

²⁵ Antony Robin, Jeremy Kushner, and Katherine Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide: Global, National, and Local Perspectives* (New York: Frank Cass, 2001), 400.

²⁶ *La Bruxellois*, October 26, 1914.

communiqué detailing events of the fighting at Ypres. It stated that the British tried to take the German position on a canal, but the attack failed with enormous losses for the British.²⁷ As with the other newspapers, *Le Bruxellois* included the Entente nations' communiqués describing small victories. In one from August 1915, Field Marshal Sir John French commander of the BEF stated that since August 1, there had been a great deal of artillery activity from both the north and east of Ypres. Nine days into the fighting, the French attacked trenches taken by the enemy west of Hooze on July 30, taking back over a thousand meters of trenches, and capturing three officers and one hundred twenty-four men.²⁸ The newspaper made no mention that the Germans had initially captured the area around Hooze utilizing six flamethrowers, which spewed liquid fire over the British trenches.²⁹ Another communiqué quoted Field Marshal French as asserting that the British inflicted on the enemy serious losses east of Loos, taking 53 officers, 2,800 soldiers, 18 cannons, and 32 machine guns.³⁰ In reality, this was the continuation of the unsuccessful Allied offensive, which resulted in slight back-and-forth gains and losses for both sides. On September 30, 1915, Joffre halted the attacks.³¹ While announcements of only minor victories for the Entente were the norm in the newspaper, the editors did allow in examples of the British and French causing great destruction, presumably to cast them in a bad light in the readers' eyes. For example, a December 30, 1915, British communiqué made it into the newspaper, proclaiming that the British

²⁷ Ibid., July 12, 1915.

²⁸ Ibid., August 11, 1915. The communiqué quoted French as giving the exact length of trench taken, which looks like 1,800 meters, but the number is too blurry in the copy of the newspaper consulted to state with certainty.

²⁹ Burg and Purcell, 76.

³⁰ *Le Bruxellois*, September 29-30, 1915.

³¹ Burg and Purcell, 85.

bombed areas behind enemy lines.³² In the same issue, a German communiqué announced that the British caused considerable damage to the Belgian city of Oostende, omitting the fact that the Germans utilized the port town as a base for submarine attacks.³³

Le Bruxellois covered the Battle of Verdun as one extended battle. This differed from many other newspapers available in occupied France that discussed various engagements without always making it obvious they were apart of the same offensive. Coverage began in earnest in the February 29, 1916, issue of the paper, when a notice described the success of the Brandenburg regiments.³⁴ This issue did not carry a lead story but began with the communiqués and two headlines, with the second drawing readers to the notice, by announcing “The Situation at Verdun.” The newspaper reported news from the Verdun front within a few days of it happening. The French attempted to retake Douaumont and failed on March 2, 1916, and the newspaper reported this fact in the March 5-6, 1916, edition.³⁵ While coverage of Verdun focused upon larger German victories and French failures, readers did gain the correct impression that Verdun quickly became a battle of attrition. The newspaper never stated that Falkenhayn wanted to inflict damage so great that the French army could not continue to fight, and it also did not mention the use of poison gas or the German introduction of flamethrowers. The editors did include communiqués that told of French soldiers utilizing grenades to take back a few trenches around Champagne.³⁶ The editors of the newspaper also did not shield

³² *Le Bruxellois*, January 2-3, 1916.

³³ *Ibid.*, January 2-3, 1916. Later in the war, British bombings damaged Oostende, along with the port city of Zeebrugge.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, February 29, 1916.

³⁵ Burg and Purcell, 104 and *Le Bruxellois*, March 5-6, 1916.

³⁶ *Le Bruxellois*, March 10-11, 1916.

readers from the damage to Verdun, informing readers that bombing completely destroyed the city.³⁷ At the beginning of April, 1916, a lead story, signed “H. Narcy,” noted that French officials evacuated the entire civilian population (which had occurred months earlier) and provided a brief history of the city of Verdun, including an overview of statues and buildings that the writer assumed were most likely destroyed.³⁸ The article suggested two older works, *Historie de Verdun* by Clouet and *Le Première Invasion Pressienne* by Chitquet for reference.³⁹

William Martin notes in *Verdun 1916: They Shall Not Pass*, that on March 9, 1916, the Germans released a communiqué announcing the capture of Fort Vaux, but it was still in French hands. Fighting continued around it until the Germans actually took Fort Vaux on June 8, 1916.⁴⁰ The official communiqués pertaining to Verdun in *Le Bruxellois* copied the German error, either accidentally or intentionally, and announced the fall of Fort Vaux in the March 10-11, 1916, issue.⁴¹ As the war of attrition continued, the newspaper still provided communiqués from Verdun, but drew less attention to them. One article, looking back upon Verdun, told of French blindness on the subject of Verdun, but not that the Germans were also wasting soldiers on an endless battle that nearly destroyed both sides, not just the French.⁴²

The British and French took the offensive in July 1916 to relieve some of the pressure on the French defending Verdun.⁴³ The Somme was a disaster for the British, as

³⁷ Ibid., March 3-4, 1916.

³⁸ Ibid., April 2-3, 1916.

³⁹ Ibid., April 2-3, 1916. Both works date back to the mid-1800s.

⁴⁰ Martin, *Verdun 1916*, 8-9.

⁴¹ *Le Bruxellois*, March 10-11, 1916.

⁴² Ibid., August 23-24, 1917.

⁴³ Burg and Purcell, 93.

they sustained 432,000 casualties before the fighting ended in November 1916.⁴⁴ Western Front coverage in *Le Bruxellois* switched over to include more Somme coverage than Verdun information by the end of July 1916. After a month of battle, the newspaper editors included an article, signed “George Gueri,” and uniquely placed on the second page of newspaper rather than the first, stating the German defenses at the Somme gave the Anglo-French forces no room to advance. He described their attack as simple blind rage.⁴⁵ The Somme lasted until mid-November 1916, and often included small skirmishes. Interestingly, *Le Bruxellois* continued to allow some positive news from the French side, such as accounts of their recapture of certain trenches or capture of small numbers of prisoners.⁴⁶ However, the emphasis placed upon French and British losses, even after the battle was over, informed readers that the French and British were the true losers at the Somme.⁴⁷ The newspaper gave approximately accurate numbers of French and British losses, but did not dwell upon the casualties inflicted upon the German army during the four and a half month battle. As William Philpott notes, an accurate figure for German casualties on the Somme will never be established, but from available evidence, he has inferred they very heavy, at around approximately 500,000 irreplaceable losses.⁴⁸

Battle coverage in *Le Bruxellois* was not limited to the Western Front and the editors included coverage of fighting in Gallipoli. Surely, to British dismay, their failures

⁴⁴ Prior and Wilson, 300. Of the 432,00 casualties, an estimated 150,000 died and another 100,000 were too seriously injured to serve again as infantry. Ibid., 301.

⁴⁵ *Le Bruxellois*, August 29-30, 1916.

⁴⁶ Ibid., October 6-7, 1916.

⁴⁷ Ibid., December 19-20, 1916. In February 1917, the Germans fell back from the salient that the Entente chose to make the focus of the 1917 offensive. For some this vindicated the attrition and loss of the Somme, but it was also a tactical move by the Germans, releasing thirteen infantry divisions. Strachan, 196.

⁴⁸ William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 521. Philpott further notes that no matter what the number of German casualties were, the German fighting units on the Somme were decimated, and this battle began the turning of the tide in the Allies' favor.

in Gallipoli in the fall of 1915 were public knowledge throughout the world. Utilizing a dispatch originating from Geneva, *Le Bruxellois* reported that Kitchener might order a retreat from Gallipoli, and this was causing outrage among the British public.⁴⁹ However, the article also allowed in a little British propaganda, noting that Kitchener planned a trip to the Orient, and that hopefully he could find bring victory for the British to the Turkish-Balkan problem.⁵⁰ For once, the newspaper perhaps underplayed this seriousness of the situation. On October 11, 1915, Lord Kitchener stated that withdrawal from Gallipoli “would be the most disastrous event in the history of the Empire.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, Lloyd George and Bonar Law forced him to fire General Ian Hamilton in Gallipoli, replacing him with General Charles Monro, who did not believe in the Gallipoli adventure.⁵² Kitchener’s visit on November 14, 1915, was to make a personal assessment before beginning the evacuation. One of the last articles about Gallipoli cited a Swiss source about the staggering losses the French and British had suffered.⁵³ Indeed, the British and French endured 252,000 casualties in Gallipoli.⁵⁴ In another example of telling only half the story – the half telling of the Entente’s problems – the Turkish side endured 251,000 casualties, albeit in a winning effort.⁵⁵ The timing of this story also would have allowed the editors to mention that the British managed a miraculous escape, evacuating 35,000 troops, 3,600 horses and mules, 127 guns, and 328 vehicles without a single casualty, but they did not.⁵⁶ Lord Kitchener died seven months later when a German mine sunk the

⁴⁹ *Le Bruxellois*, November 8-9, 1915.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, November 8-9, 1915.

⁵¹ Burg and Purcell, 86.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Le Bruxellois*, January 14-15, 1916. The article cites an exact number, but the edition consulted was too unclear to state with certainty what was that number.

⁵⁴ Burg and Purcell, 95.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

armored cruiser *Hampshire*, which he was traveling upon to Russia not far from the Orkney Islands. *Le Bruxellois* recognized Lord Kitchener as a worthy military man, describing his career as brilliant.⁵⁷

German Success and Greatness

René Deruyk, who wrote several books about the German occupation of Lille, noted, “Buy *le Bruxellois* and you will read every day how the German army has never lost a soldier.”⁵⁸ The examples of German bias in the newspaper were too numerous to record them all, but the praise – not just the reporting - of Hindenburg’s triumphs on Germany’s Eastern Front in an article recapping the war in 1915 provides a good example.⁵⁹ While there is no doubt the Central Powers enjoyed success in 1915 on the Eastern Front, the emphasis placed on Germany’s victories revealed the Germanophile stance of the paper.

By the fall of 1917, the tides were turning against Germany on the Western Front. Hence, *Le Bruxellois* again reported in detail about German successes on the Eastern Front, notably Hindenburg’s taking of Riga.⁶⁰ The German victory at Riga in September 1917 to all intents and purposes took Russia from the war. This allowed the Germans to begin to transfer forces to the Western Front, giving them at eighteen-division superiority over the Allies at the start of 1918.⁶¹ One report captured Russian shock at the event, noting that the Russians expected the Germans to attempt to occupy Riga, but thought

⁵⁷ *Le Bruxellois*, June 7-8, 1916.

⁵⁸ “Achète donc le *Bruxellois* et tu y liras tous les jours que l’armée ne perd jamais un soldat.” Quoted in Visse *La presse du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais*, 197.

⁵⁹ *Le Bruxellois*, January 5-6, 1916.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, September 5, 1917.

⁶¹ Tucker, ed. *The Encyclopedia of World War I*, 717.

such an attack was not imminent because the rivers provided safety.⁶² As late as August 31, life was carrying on as normal in Riga, with even the theatres playing as usual.⁶³ The editors placed particular emphasis on German prowess by providing a great deal of newspaper space to stories telling of German submarine and aerial feats.

German success at sea came from its submarine campaign. Germany showed caution in utilizing its High Seas Fleet, due to weakness in numbers, geographical disadvantages, and an inferiority complex, reinforced by the Heligoland Bight and Dogger Bank battles.⁶⁴ For most of the war, the main achievement of the German High Seas Fleet was forcing the British to invest in an infrastructure for supporting their Grand Fleet, whose ships could otherwise been useful in commerce protection and anti-submarine warfare.⁶⁵ The only major fleet engagement of the First World War took place in the North Sea, west of the Jutland peninsula of Denmark and ended with the British losing 6,094 dead and Germany losing 2,551.⁶⁶ However, *Le Bruxellois* covered this one apparent German naval success, the Battle of Jutland, in detail over several days. While some historians concluded that the battle ended in little worse than a tie, the Germans gained a public relations victory because of the number of British ships sunk.⁶⁷ Referring to it, as is the German practice, as the Battle of Skaggerak, the headline was about the naval battle for a full week, with the newspaper editors reprinting German statements that it was a grand and brilliant success, as well as American newspaper coverage alleging

⁶² *Le Bruxellois*, September 6, 1917.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Stevenson, 205.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Clark G. Reynolds, *Navies in History* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 162 and Stevenson, 208.

⁶⁷ Burg and Purcell, 117.

that Germany had just won the largest naval battle in modern history, with the win being meaningful to the outcome of the war.⁶⁸

With this one exception, *Le Bruxellois* focused upon German submarine successes. Dozens of blurbs appeared like the one that stated that between October 1 and October 20, 1915, French steamships sunk in the Mediterranean included the *Provencia*, the *Sainte-Marie*, the *Antoine*, and the *Amoral Hamile*.⁶⁹ The German submarine sinking the *Lusitania* went beyond the initial story to telling of the political fallout that ensued. Indeed, the consequences of the German sinking of the *Lusitania* received extensive coverage, including the back and forth diplomatic correspondence between the United States and Germany. Coverage of this issue may be an example of people in the occupied zone receiving a distorted report of events. Under the paper's frequent section, "Press Review," an article appeared reporting that American opinion in regard to the latest German note was generally favorable.⁷⁰ Germany sent a second note, responding to the American note, on July 8, 1915. According to Dinana Preston, who wrote *Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy*, this note was as unsatisfactory to the American administration as the previous German note, as it evaded the issue of sinking enemy ships without warning.⁷¹ President Wilson did not intend to accept the German offer to provide safe conduct to American ships (painted in American colors through the submarine zone provided the Germans received advanced notice). The American press backed the president, and made quips about "barber ships" as the American ships painted with red, white, and blue stripes

⁶⁸ *Le Bruxellois*, June 3-4, 1916 and June 5-6, 1916.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, October 25-26, 1915.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, July 29, 1915.

⁷¹ Diana Preston, *Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy* (New York: Walker Publishing, 2002), 356.

would look like barber poles.⁷² The timing of this article in *Le Bruxellois* was interesting, as eight days earlier President Wilson had sent another note to Germany, which noted that any future infringement of American rights would be deemed deliberately unfriendly.

Le Bruxellois shared news of both zeppelin attacks and the success of German flying aces. The German pride in their zeppelin attacks carried over to the reporting of those attacks in *Le Bruxellois*. The need to tie up numerous British and French squadrons was the zeppelin's greatest achievement. The cost of constructing the one hundred fifteen zeppelins employed by the Germans was approximately five times the cost of the damage they inflicted.⁷³ However, the editors of *Le Bruxellois* focused upon the fear zeppelin raids caused, including in the newspaper an article entitled, "A War Night in Paris," which stated that life had greatly changed in Paris as it could no longer be the "city of lights."⁷⁴ The editors were correct in noting the atmosphere of fear the zeppelins created. A bold, large, headline screamed "Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, and Sheffield Bombed," and the following blurb noted that the bombing by the zeppelin did not kill anybody and the only damage done was to a communication establishment.⁷⁵ The editors chose this story wisely, as it showed both Germany's might and sense of chivalrous conduct of war.

The newspaper also reported upon the aerial aspect of the battles at Verdun and the Somme. Verdun saw the largest use of aircraft in war as an adjunct to a battle waged on land to that time, a fact that *Le Bruxellois* shared with readers.⁷⁶ A communiqué stated

⁷² Ibid., 356.

⁷³ James H. Meredith, *Understanding the Literature of World War I* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 141.

⁷⁴ *Le Bruxellois*, May 11-12, 1916.

⁷⁵ Ibid., February 2-3, 1916.

⁷⁶ Burg and Purcell, 105.

German pilots came out the winners in air battles around Verdun, as German planes shot down at least three Entente planes and several French pilots sustained injuries.⁷⁷ As the battle of the Somme concluded in November after the Germans sustained nearly a half million casualties, the newspaper focused upon a description of aerial battle, noting that the superiority of the German flyers displayed itself clearly.⁷⁸ While most of the coverage of the aerial war was to vaunt German successes, *Le Bruxellois* also carried a few examples of Entente failures. Utilizing a Havas report, the paper reported that the French dirigible *Alsace* that left on October 2, 1915, on a bombing mission, did not return and that a German source said that it had been downed and its crew taken prisoner.⁷⁹ *Le Bruxellois*'s editors demonstrated compassion and civility at least once in covering the aerial war. When French aviator Adolphe Pégoud died, the German press expressed its sympathy and *Le Bruxellois* summarized these sentiments in its pages.⁸⁰ Their remorse at the death of the first flying ace appeared genuine.

Problems in the Entente Countries

This newspaper certainly kept readers abreast of the political and social issues plaguing France and England, if at times exaggerating those problems. *Le Bruxellois* informed readers about problems in French politics, with pieces on the French economy, the French public spirit, and alcoholism and population decline. France's political happenings were always good fodder for *Le Bruxellois*, as could be seen in the pages of the newspaper toward the end of October 1915. At that time, the French cabinet

⁷⁷ *Le Bruxellois*, March 10-11, 1916.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, November 16-17, 1916.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, October 7-8, 1915.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, September 4-5, 1915.

reshuffled, mainly in response to the lack of French success in the Balkans. In this reshuffle, René Viviani and Aristide Briand switched positions, with Briand becoming prime minister and Viviani taking his spot as deputy prime minister. While this restructuring left Millerand out and added the Catholic right leader Denys Cochin, there was a great deal of continuity in the personnel of the French government.⁸¹ However, to read about the cabinet change in *Le Bruxellois* was to believe the entire French government was undergoing a crisis. While the newspaper editors admitted they shared this news with reservation because their sources were not the best, they reported that even President Poincaré's position was in jeopardy.⁸² The editors' reservations about their sources did not stop them from running the banner headline "Presidential Crisis in France?" at the top of that issue. Follow-up issues correctly named the new members of the French cabinet, without making reference to previous statements that Poincaré's position was in jeopardy, and article authors focused upon the failure of the old cabinet that led to its fall.⁸³ A two-part story on Georges Clémenceau portrayed him as the only respectable politician in France, as he was the only one not trying to fool the people of France.⁸⁴ Despite the editors holding Clémenceau up as the one just public figure left in France, they did not praise him once he became the French prime minister in November 1917. In 1916 Clémenceau was "the tiger," a man pointing out the flaws in the French military system, and of course also providing fodder for German propaganda. When he became prime minister, *Le Bruxellois* emphasized his repression of dissent, and arrest of

⁸¹ Stevenson, 216.

⁸² *Le Bruxellois*, October 28-29, 1915. Raymond Poincaré remained president of France until 1919.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, October 29-30, 1915 and October 30-31, 1915.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, July 9-10, 1916 and July 10-11, 1916.

a few senior politicians with pro-German views. He stopped being a *Le Bruxellois* favorite.

The failing French economy received attention in the pages of *Le Bruxellois* several times in the course of the newspaper's life. An example that typifies the coverage was a lead story that ran in the summer of 1916, stating that the economic situation in France worsened with the war, and comparing the French poorly with that of Germany in terms of sustaining its war effort.⁸⁵ The timing of the article demonstrated the presence of German propaganda, telling only the problems of one country and not the other. This was the first summer that the pressure of the British blockade caused the critical failure of German agriculture. The lack of fertilizer led to a poor potato crop in the summer and shortages of fodder for livestock reduced meat production. Hardship was Germany's in the coming winter.⁸⁶

Early in 1916, one article told of a deeply discouraged French public, waiting impatiently for the end of the war, a sentiment *Le Bruxellois* portrayed as similar public opinion in other Entente countries.⁸⁷ At this time, civilian morale was beginning to crack in most of the warring nations, including Germany. For example, 50,000 German workers had a three-day work stoppage in Berlin to object to the arrest of radical socialist leaders.⁸⁸ *Le Bruxellois* did not cover this. Another article appeared in the newspaper that summer, stating that nervousness permeated the French capital, as popular sentiment felt Germany might still have war plans unknown to French leaders.⁸⁹ A common thread

⁸⁵ Ibid., July 4-5, 1916.

⁸⁶ Eric W. Osborne, *Britain's Economic Blockade of Germany 1914-1919* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 144.

⁸⁷ *Le Bruxellois*, January 18-19, 1916.

⁸⁸ Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization*, Vol. II: *Since 1500* (Belmont, California: Thomson Wadsworth, 2009), 784.

⁸⁹ *Le Bruxellois*, August 17-18, 1916.

(discussed later in this chapter) suggested that England was to blame for the war. The editors of the newspaper at times suggested that not only was England to blame for starting the war, but the French government was separate from the French people. The editors hinted that the French people were tiring of their government. In a lead story, entitled “The Essential Causes of the World War,” the newspaper reported that while French newspapers might blame German militarism and economic organization for the war, the French people did not agree. Rather, brave, isolated voices from within France note that French political leaders did nothing to avoid war, making their nation as responsible as any other.⁹⁰ The article, taken from an unnamed Geneva newspaper, cited Jean Grave as one of those voices blaming France for the war. Grave was an anarchist (a word not utilized to describe him in the *Le Bruxellois* article) who edited two newspapers, *La Révolté* and *Les Temps Nouveaux*. That Grave blamed France for the war is a partial truth. He blamed the war upon commercial aims, such as finding new markets, “which themselves were part of a larger mosaic that not only included the civil and military bureaucracies in imperialism’s service but also a largely predatory bourgeois *Weltanschauung* tied to nationalism that expropriated the lands of conquered peoples ... [done] by appealing to a jingoistic patriotism.”⁹¹ Such a viewpoint hardly exonerated Germany from partial blame for the starting the war. An unsigned lead story blamed Poincaré and Briand for leading France into war, declaring them jointly a third Napoleon. This article writer claimed the real destiny of France was under socialist leadership, not the militarism of the governing elite.⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibid., May 26-27, 1916.

⁹¹ Louis Patsouras, *The Anarchism of Jean Grave: Editor, Journalist, and Militant* (Montreal: Black Rose Press, 2003), 97.

⁹² *Le Bruxellois*, October 1-2, 1916.

A common thread in the newspaper was evident in lead stories warning about the scourge of alcohol throughout Europe. This was not a topic unique to *Le Bruxellois*, as alcohol use became an area of concern in all the warring nations, as people saw it as both an impediment to mobilization and a waste of resources.⁹³ In an article published early in the period of the paper's distribution in France, Marc de Salm pointed to the issues facing Russia and France due to drink.⁹⁴ However, both countries had done exactly what de Salm was asking; taken definite action to stem the tide of alcohol abuse. In Russia, the tsar halted the operation of the state vodka monopoly in 1914, curtailed the sale of spirits, wine, and beer, and voided all prewar licenses, despite this action causing a dramatic drop in revenue for the government.⁹⁵ France relied more upon propaganda linking alcohol abuse to military impotence to quell over drinking, but did limit café hours and banned absinthe in the year after de Salm's article appeared.⁹⁶ While Marc de Salm did manage to insert a few jabs at Germany's enemies into this article, it appears that his concern over alcoholism was not a German imposed issue; in Germany, the government placed limits on drinking, but concerns were based on the grain supply, rather than on intemperance.⁹⁷ De Salm also wrote an additional lead story, telling the shocking story of alcohol and opium abuse in France⁹⁸ A few days later another article stated that Parisians amused themselves during the war by drinking a great deal at night.⁹⁹

Interestingly, de Salm tied alcoholism to another topic he frequently returned to, namely women's suffrage. He noted that in places where women had the vote, such as

⁹³ Spencer Tucker, ed., *World War One: A Student Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 122.

⁹⁴ *Le Bruxellois*, July 15, 1915.

⁹⁵ Tucker, *Student Encyclopedia*, 122.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Le Bruxellois*, July 18-19, 1916.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, July 23-24, 1916.

Denmark and New Zealand, women worked to combat alcoholism and “cabaretisme.”¹⁰⁰ De Salm returned to the evils of alcoholism many times in the newspaper, and not just to cast aspersions on France and Russia; he also wrote on the effects on children of their mothers’ drinking.¹⁰¹ *Le Bruxellois* quoted a French specialist on the subject of alcoholism when it wrote an article on Dr. P. Garnier’s *La Folie à Paris*.¹⁰² Originally published in 1890, Garnier’s work studied the medico-legal aspects of moral offenses, frequently finding alcohol to be a contributing factor. Not surprisingly for a work done in France, the information discusses alcoholism in Paris, which, within the pages of *Le Bruxellois*, cast the city in a bad light.

Alcohol abuse and France’s population decline were two interconnected issues in the pages of *Le Bruxellois*. Marc de Salm wrote another lead story, this time entitled “Antialcoholism in France,” stating that alcohol was the prime cause of the degeneration of the human race. He noted that France was facing becoming a second tier power, thanks to its low birthrate, which he tied to alcoholism.¹⁰³ Another lead story cautioned about the abnormalities caused in children born to alcoholic parents, warning parents within the occupied zone not to undermine their children with this behavior.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, in most countries, protecting children from alcohol abuse was a key issue, as people viewed children as both an investment and a threat due to their value as future healthy, economically productive citizens.¹⁰⁵ Some articles gave the impression of being an unbiased overview of depopulation and birth rate trends throughout Europe. Then at

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., July 15, 1915.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., August 27-28, 1915.

¹⁰² Ibid., November 22-23, 1915.

¹⁰³ Ibid., October 18, 1915.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., November 3-4, 1915.

¹⁰⁵ Betsy Thom, “Alcohol: Protecting the Young, Protecting Society,” *Growing up with Risk*, Betsy Thom and Rosemary Sales, eds. (Bristol, U.K.: Policy Press, 2007), 247.

some point in the article, the writer pointed to France to prove his point about the dangers of population decline. One article admitted that Germany was also starting down the road of diminished birthrates in its large cities.¹⁰⁶

The newspaper editors returned to the topic of the low French birth rate frequently, and not all articles simply associated the with the alcohol abuse.¹⁰⁷ One article placed the blame for France's future population woes on the women of the country, stating that "chosen infertility" was the cause of France's falling birthrate.¹⁰⁸ Attacking France for its low birthrate was commenting on a portion of the country's long-term war preparedness. France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war stunned the nation. Many fixed upon the relative size of France's population compared to Germany's and France's low birthrate.¹⁰⁹ Hence, pronatalism became a nationalist concern to many, with maternity becoming a measure of national defense.¹¹⁰

Evil and Untrustworthy Nature of the Entente Countries

The international coverage of *Le Bruxellois*, while extensive, was suffused with pro-German propaganda in which we can discern certain broad themes. *Le Bruxellois'* editors seem to have enjoyed demonstrating that France, Germany, and Belgium shared a common enemy even if they did not know it: England. Their paradigm was that England caused the war but was not suffering alongside the others. The United States enjoyed positive coverage at first, but as it grew closer to declaring war, America became corrupt capitalists with an agenda. Coverage of the Russian revolution in this newspaper is

¹⁰⁶ *Le Bruxellois*, May 23-24, 1916.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, March 24-25, 1916.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, January 10-11, 1917.

¹⁰⁹ Darrow, 33.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

intriguing, as the editors walked a fine line of declaring the Tsarist government malevolent, but not wanting to endorse wholeheartedly the provisional government. Finally under this heading is included the newspaper's coverage of Greece during the war, as the editors continuously highlighted events in Greece to demonstrate the underhanded manner in which France and England conducted the war.

The mantra of the newspaper's staff was that England was the true enemy of the French and Belgians. One lead story provided an analysis of the causes of war, concluding that British capitalism was the cause, as England feared the increased industrial competition from Germany and the United States.¹¹¹ This was a common refrain of the editors, who frequently laid blame for starting the war on Britain's doorstep, as opposed to Germany. One lead story, entitled "The Punishment of Germany," stated that England saw Germany as a troublesome economic competitor, so it began the war to make Germany docile and less of a commercial threat.¹¹² The newspaper enjoyed sharing the differences in the cost of living in England and France to show France suffering much more from the war. In one issue, a blurb under the heading "Foreign News" stated that it cost thirty percent more to live in France than England, with a pound of meat costing 1.75 francs in England compared to 2.5 francs in France.¹¹³ This brief news item reflected reality, as Britain experienced the least disruption to civilian society of any warring nation.¹¹⁴ In 1915, the British state introduced fixed prices for essential food, and the centralized distribution of food supplies and rationing meant

¹¹¹ *Le Bruxellois*, December 9-10, 1915.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, February 10-11, 1917.

¹¹³ *Le Bruxellois*, July 22, 1915.

¹¹⁴ Ian Cawood and David McKinnon-Bell, *The First World War* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 53.

that nutrition, especially among the poor, actually improved during the war.¹¹⁵ At the same time, France faced falling agricultural output due to the mobilization of farmers and rising food prices. Interestingly, towards the end of 1917, when the rise in food prices in France became dramatic, British assistance helped restore the French food supply.¹¹⁶ However, at least one story contradicted the notion that England was not suffering due to the war. Rather, news reached readers that Britain had to introduce bread cards due to the success of the German submarine campaign in reducing supplies of imported food stuffs.¹¹⁷ Britain faced a food crisis by the end of 1917 (several months after this notice appeared), manifested in long shopping lines for butter, tea, and meat. In January 1918, the British Ministry of Food issued ration cards for scarce food (the Ministry had begun a registration program before this), which was a solid success.¹¹⁸ Consumption of bread went up during the war, as it compensated for the decline in per capita consumption of butter, fresh meat, sugar, and milk.¹¹⁹ Germany fared much more poorly on the home front, as the government had to ration almost all foods and most were in very short supply.

Not surprisingly, the British blockade of Germany received a great deal of negative attention in newspaper. While the newspaper blamed the blockade for a lack of food, the editors chose stories that focused more upon international abhorrence of the blockade, and in particular, the reaction of America before its entry into the war. The editors of the newspaper appeared to want to push an agenda of British-American animosity. Towards the end of January 1916, a headline and attendant article highlighted

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ *Le Bruxellois*, May 1-2, 1917.

¹¹⁸ Gerd Hardach, *The First World War, 1914-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 130.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

the discord between the two countries by reliving their enmity during the American Civil War.¹²⁰ One article, entitled “England and the American Note” stated that England believed Wilson’s note denouncing the British blockade did not change anything.¹²¹ The article hinted at British callousness in the face of world judgment. The United States had, months earlier, sent lengthy official notes protesting the infringements on the legal rights of neutrals to trade in non-contraband goods. The notes warned of the bad effect on American opinion of British practices, but Wilson stated it in friendly terms.¹²² Realistically, England had nothing to fear from these notes. By late 1915, not only had American opinion swayed to the Entente side, but any American economic loss from the British blockade was more than compensated for by increased Allied purchases of American goods.¹²³ The newspaper’s editors had no qualms stating their view of the blockade; they entitled “A Tyrannical System” one lead story on the blockade signed “PAX.”¹²⁴

Another 1916 article, under “Press Review,” and taken from the *Economiste français*, provided several statistics demonstrating that France was spending huge sums upon the war, while England was enriching itself.¹²⁵ The timing of the article was fortuitous; the balance of trade between Britain and France was moving steadily against France, forcing the latter to raise taxes and increase its borrowing.¹²⁶ That did not

¹²⁰ *Le Bruxellois*, January 28-29, 1916.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, November 11-12, 1915.

¹²² Carl Cavanagh Hodge and Cathal J. Nolan, eds. *U.S. Presidents and Foreign Policy: From 1789 to the Present* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 214.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Le Bruxellois*, February 6-7, 1916.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, April 18-19, 1916.

¹²⁶ Martin Horn, *Britain, France, and the Financing of the First World War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University, 2002), 76.

translate into Britain shrinking from making its economic contribution to the war, as it often financially carrying her allies.

A lead story, signed Zoltan de Szasz, expounded upon the idea that France was the principal victim of the war.¹²⁷ He stated that Poincaré's "victory at any cost" was hurting the nation, as the war was destroying France's – not Germany or England's – cities and artwork. Another article, this one by Marc de Salm, told much the same story, this time under the headline, "The French Nation Has Been Led to War in Spite of Herself."¹²⁸ A further lead story argued that Britain – not Germany – was France's hereditary enemy. Signed A. Gel., the writer, admitted that since the war of 1870, the French hated the Germans, but if people had longer memories, they would recall whom they truly disliked, especially if one asked a Picard, Norman, or Breton.¹²⁹ A lead article signed "Sera," asserted that the war revealed British character, with the good being three million men signing up, and the negative being the lack of talent and courage in leadership.¹³⁰ If readers still had any doubt about England's integrity, *Le Bruxellois* provided coverage of the Irish troubles, casting the English as exploiting the Irish.¹³¹

While Britain consistently received poor treatment in the pages of *Le Bruxellois*, the treatment of the United States varied over time. During the first months of publication, the editors and journalists wrote courteously about the United States. Before the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917, *Le Bruxellois* devoted several articles explaining why the United States would never enter the war on the side of the British and

¹²⁷ *Le Bruxellois*, November 20-21, 1915. Little is known about the author, except that he wrote other pieces, including *M. Paul Adam et la morale de Paris* (1909).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, November 25-26, 1915. "La nation Française a été entraînée à la guerre malgré elle."

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, December 21-22, 1915.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, March 27-28, 1916.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, May 3-4, 1916.

French. For example, in May 1916, a lead story signed “Jonathan,” asserted that the United States would not enter the war because it would be bad for its economy.¹³² The same edition carried a quotation from the American ambassador to Germany, James Watson Gerald, that he wished peace to continue between the two countries. The article suggested that Gerald had warm feelings for Germany, when in fact he was so unabashed in his anti-Germanism that President Wilson grew to believe it compromised his effectiveness.¹³³

Slowly the editors began commenting more about America as a country driven by economic ambition. The editors of the newspaper mentioned numerous times how wealthy the United States was becoming thanks to the war. One lead story, simply entitled “The United States becomes Rich from the War,” reiterated the wealth that was streaming across the ocean.¹³⁴ This was indeed true. The war quickly reversed the credit standing of the United States. The Entente powers began importing massive quantities of American goods, unmatched by the same quantities of exports. At first, the European countries paid these debts in gold, almost doubling the American gold supply by 1917.¹³⁵ As the gold supply of European countries rapidly diminished, the United States extended loans and accepted securities in payment. By the time American neutrality ended in April 1917, it held over a billion dollars in foreign securities and several billion dollars in newly acquired European debt obligations.¹³⁶ Readers of *Le Bruxellois* knew that the financial capital of the world was shifting from London to New York.

¹³² Ibid., May 7-8, 1916.

¹³³ Spencer Tucker, ed. *U.S. Leadership in Wartime: Clashes, Controversy, and Compromise* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 495.

¹³⁴ *Le Bruxellois*, May 17-18, 1916.

¹³⁵ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 306.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

As German submarine policies soured German-American relations, references to the United States became more insulting and dismissive as the editors described the country as immoral and money-obsessed. In a lead story appearing in the late summer of 1916, the editors of the newspaper referred to “dollaricans” and described America’s military as small and dated.¹³⁷ In the pages of *Le Bruxellois*, the editors began treating the United States as an enemy while President Wilson was still engaged in a re-election campaign, running on a peace platform. The newspaper’s editors’ opinion of the American military was “on the mark”; even though the United States National Defense Act of 1916 authorized a wartime regular army strength of 300,000 men and a National Guard of 400,000, it in no way provided for an army comparable to those of the European combatants.¹³⁸ Indeed, in 1916, Portugal, with a smaller population than Ohio, maintained a great-sized army than America.¹³⁹ By 1918, the newspaper carried a lead story entitled “Wilson and Yankee Hypocrisy,” stating that while the American president might claim to be an academic and an idealist he acted like another Entente minister.¹⁴⁰ The article concluded almost threateningly towards the United States, stating the country was about to pay a heavy price.¹⁴¹

Le Bruxellois covered the Russian revolution daily and in detail, ensuring readers in the occupied zone knew as much as readers anywhere else. Starting in March 1917, the newspaper informed readers that twenty thousand men joined the revolutionaries and all the tsarist ministers were in prison.¹⁴² The reference to twenty thousand men having

¹³⁷ *Le Bruxellois*, August 21-22, 1916.

¹³⁸ Maurice Matloff, *American Military History*, Vol. 2: 1902-1996 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 25-6.

¹³⁹ Ignatius Phayre, “America Makes Ready,” *The Living Age* (1916) 288: 182.

¹⁴⁰ *Le Bruxellois*, July 12, 1918.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, March 15-16, 1917.

joined the revolutionaries most likely referred to the Bolshevik Party membership, which numbered around 20,000 men in February, 1917.¹⁴³ At this point, the Bolsheviks were a rather insignificant political force, but in the spring and summer of 1917, it grew quickly, as tens of thousands of new members joined, drawn by the Bolshevik Party's promise of a better future. The Bolshevik Party became a national force as soldiers, tired of the war, became increasingly radicalized and joined the party.¹⁴⁴

Frequently news from Russia garnered the newspaper's headline, such as when the Tsar abdicated.¹⁴⁵ But early coverage of events in Russia presented *Le Bruxellois*' editors with difficulties; they had been very critical of Russian government under the monarchy but did not want to praise the revolution. Hence, most of the information focused upon the wrongs of the tsarist government that had provoked this uprising and the ensuing chaos. For example, the newspaper reported that train travel to Petrograd stopped and the rioting continued in the suburbs on March 16-17, 1917.¹⁴⁶ The lead story on that day told readers not to have any illusions about any change because, the ignorance of the Russian people ensured that the country would not make any great strides.¹⁴⁷ The newspaper summarized the free French press' coverage of Russian affairs, noting that the general sentiment in France was one of pessimism, as the country feared that Russia might not observe the promises it had made to the Allies.¹⁴⁸ *Le Bruxellois* covered the bevy of problems facing Russia, from naval officers protesting brutal reprimands to the

¹⁴³ Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Russia after Lenin: Politics, Culture, and Society, 1921-1929* (London: Routledge, 2005), 8.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ *Le Bruxellois*, March 16-17, 1917.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., May 19-20, 1917.

disheartened spirits of the people of St. Petersburg.¹⁴⁹ Readers learned in a timely manner about the German peace offer to Russia and the different workers and soldiers' councils about to vote upon it.¹⁵⁰ Of course it was with the Bolshevik Revolution in November that Russia left the war, freeing up German troops for Germany's last great offensive in 1918.

Le Bruxellois kept readers informed of developments in detail in the countries late to declare war, including Romania and Bulgaria. However, events in Greece received a greater amount of attention, as the editors utilized this coverage to vilify the French and British. Readers of *Le Bruxellois* were well informed on happenings in Greece, beginning in mid-August 1915, and continuing for over a year. The war tore Greece apart, as King Constantine, brother-in-law of the Kaiser, believed the Germans would win the war and wanted to remain neutral while Prime Minister Venizelos judged that the Entente would be victorious and wanted to intervene on the side of the French and British.¹⁵¹ The British and French admittedly took advantage of a divided Greece. The Entente nations, having no success in the eastern Mediterranean, debated the strategic merits of Salonika. Once Bulgaria mobilized in September 1915, Britain and France decided to land troops at Salonika to march north in aid of the Serbs. Prime Minister Venizelos approved the plan, even though Greece was still neutral, leading the king to demand his resignation.¹⁵² On October 5, 1915, Entente troops arrived in Salonika, leading Constantine to threaten that if British and French troops did not leave, he would order the Greek army to allow Bulgarian forces into Greece. He delivered on this threat in the spring of 1916, as the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., October 20, 1917.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., June 21, 1917.

¹⁵¹ Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims, and Jews 1430-1950* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 287.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Bulgarian army took over Greek border fortifications and took most of the Greek Fourth Army prisoner.¹⁵³ This act clearly threatened Greece's territorial integrity and national honor, turning popular opinion against the king. It also outraged the Entente powers, and they declared martial law in Salonika on June 3, 1916, as French troops took over the main government buildings. On August 30, 1916, a pro-Entente revolution declared Macedonia independent of Athens, and Venizelos established a provisional government sympathetic to the Entente, creating two Greek governments. This drama unfolded in the pages of *Le Bruxellois*, as Greece frequently made the headlines of the newspaper.¹⁵⁴ Coverage of this topic portrayed the British as bullies, confronting Greece with unfair ultimatums.¹⁵⁵ In many articles, it appeared that France was practically invading Greece, although at least one article asserted that Greece accorded the Entente powers right of passage.¹⁵⁶ One headline read, "Occupation of Salonika by the Entente," making the situation sound similar to that of the Germans in Belgium and northern France. Another read "Salonika Evacuated by Greek Troops."¹⁵⁷ Another notice appeared under the title "Reign of Terror in Greece," in which the Allied high commissioner Célestin Jonnart is only referred to as a dictator.¹⁵⁸

The newspaper revealed in Delcassé's resignation as French foreign minister, announcing it in a headline in the October 13-14, 1915, issue. Suddenly, Delcassé became a respectable politician in the *Le Bruxellois*, choosing to resign rather than stand by the violation of Greek neutrality.¹⁵⁹ In one lead story, Pierre Hantcheff described

¹⁵³ Ibid., 289.

¹⁵⁴ *Le Bruxellois*, October 5-6, 1915 and October 9-10, 1915.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., October 29-30, 1915.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., October 18-19, 1915.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., December 29-30, 1915.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., June 21, 1917.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., October, 13-14, 1915.

Delcassé as a victim of France's deceitful Balkan political dealings.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, Delcassé resigned because he did not believe in the creation of a Balkan front; however the newspaper made no mention of any Greek compliance with the Entente powers landing troops in Salonika, providing the appearance that Delcassé was resigning due to French violation of international law, eliminating all shades of gray from the complex issue.

People in occupied France may not have appreciated the slant added to coverage of the Entente powers in Salonika, but at least *Le Bruxellois* kept them abreast of events almost daily. The lack of follow-up available in other newspapers in occupied France helped give the impression that people in occupied France knew little of what was going on in the news. This newspaper provided consistent news on events in Greece.

However, the coverage did contain factual errors. The newspaper editors may have gotten ahead of themselves when the newspaper announced the French government had recalled General Sarrail from Salonika in April 1915.¹⁶¹ Sarrail was experiencing failures at the time, as two British divisions failed to break into the German-Bulgarian positions.

However, it took several months of complaints until the French government replaced him in December 1917 with General Marie-Louis Guillaumat.¹⁶² The newspaper's editors made another slight error, when the newspaper informed readers the Greek King Constantine had abdicated in June 1917.¹⁶³ In reality, conflict with General Sarrail and the Allied forces had forced the king into exile but without formal abdication.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., October 20-21, 1915.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., April 14-15, 1916.

¹⁶² Michel Hickey, *The First World War: The Mediterranean Front, 1914-1923* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 86.

¹⁶³ *Le Bruxellois*, June 14-15, 1917.

Push for Pacifism

Items chosen from international news and lead stories written by the newspaper's editors frequently advocated pacifism. The aim of this pacifism, according to Oscar Millard, was to undermine the morale of the civilian population and quash their patriotic sentiments.¹⁶⁴ The newspaper's editors gave the impression that the people of Belgium wanted peace. Occasionally the newspaper included a "Free Forum," article, similar to a letter to the editor.¹⁶⁵ These articles frequently supported the concept that people wanted peace. One such article, published in the lead story position, stated that the working class had had enough of war, and that the socialist movement wanted peace.¹⁶⁶ The editors added to this, with one article pointing out the economic costs of the war to individuals, noting that military service delayed the age at which a young man could begin his working career.¹⁶⁷

The editors of the newspaper reported on "Lloyd George and the Neutral Press," noting that the Swedish press denounced the prime minister's ignoring the last peace proposal by Lord Lansdowne as another example of British imperialism.¹⁶⁸ Lord Lansdowne led the Conservative opposition in the House of Lords from 1905-1915, continuously defeating measures passed by the Liberal majority in the House of Commons.¹⁶⁹ In May 1915, he entered the coalition cabinet as a minister (without a portfolio). By 1916, he believed that a negotiated with Germany was the only solution.

¹⁶⁴ Oscar E. Millard, *Underground News: The Complete Story of the Secret Newspaper that made War History* (New York: Robert M. McBride and Co., 1938), 21.

¹⁶⁵ "Tribune libre."

¹⁶⁶ *Le Bruxellois*, November 18-19, 1916.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, August 13-14, 1915.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, August 8, 1918.

¹⁶⁹ Serge Ricard, "Anti-Wilsonian Internationalism, Theodore Roosevelt in the Kansas City Star," *From Theodore Roosevelt to FDR: Internationalism and Isolationism in American Foreign Policy*, Daniele Rossini, ed. (Bodmin, England: Keele University Press, 1995), 30.

Without consulting the rest of the Cabinet, he shared his views by addressing himself to the press. His “peace letter” appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* on November 29, 1917. He stated he did not want to annihilate Germany as a great power or deny her place among great commercial communities of the world.¹⁷⁰ It is not surprising Lloyd George did not embrace Lord Landsdowne’s suggestions.

In December 1916, Germany suggested peace negotiations. However, the chancellor’s offer, published on December 12, was meaningless, as it failed to specify terms with the exception that the peace offered rested on a German victory.¹⁷¹ From this moment on, the editors of *Le Bruxellois* placed the blame for the continuation of the war upon France and England. A lead story, signed simply “R.A.” stated that by refusing to enter into negotiations with the Central Powers, the Entente Powers were completely responsible for the continuation of the war.¹⁷² Another article recounted Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg’s speech to the Reichstag to the effect that the British and French had spurned Germany’s proposed peace talks it was they who forced the war’s continuation. Germany therefore had the right to utilize submarines to win the war.¹⁷³

Conclusion

The German occupiers gave the newspaper a title meant to invoke friendly sentiments and its by-lines always carried Belgian-named contributors. This did not change the German control over the newspaper, implemented not only through stringent censorship but also by staffing it with Germanophiles. Sophie de Schaepdrijver describes

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹⁷¹ Strachan, 226.

¹⁷² *Le Bruxellois*, January 22-23, 1917.

¹⁷³ Ibid., February 2-3, 1917.

both *La Belgique* and *Le Bruxellois* as propagating the German cause with some subtleness. This was much less true for *Le Bruxellois* than *La Belgique*. The pro-German stance of the newspaper editors permeated every issue. When Romania attacked Austria-Hungary and declared war on the Central Powers, Marc de Salm wrote in a lead story that it was a historic date that might prove fatal for Romania.¹⁷⁴ As this chapter attempted to demonstrate, the editors and staff arranged news in a manner meant to dishearten the Belgian and French readers, but news was present in abundance. The result was that readers of *Le Bruxellois* knew a great deal about the happenings of the war, except perhaps the news they most wanted. As the war began going badly for Germany during 1917, the newspaper reported mostly upon the rarer and rarer bright spots for the Germans, such as the taking of Ösel island in the Gulf of Finland in October 1917.¹⁷⁵ By the time the newspaper carried news suggestive of Germany and Austria-Hungary's fate in September of 1918 it is uncertain whether the newspaper was still available in occupied France. The newspaper still carried an announcement at the time of each issue explaining its "international" availability, but with the problems facing the Germans, it would be surprising if the newspaper still reached Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., August 29-30, 1916.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., October 20, 1917.

Chapter Ten:

The Clandestine Press

Maxence van der Meersch's fictionalized account of life in occupied Roubaix accurately captures how people reacted to life under occupation. His portrayal of people's need for information and reactions to the clandestine press are particularly poignant. He writes, "But in this state of universal uncertainty, imaginations grew heated. Elaborate stories gained currency; tales of sensational defeats and victories were passed from mouth to mouth... It was quite obvious that the continued ignorance was sapping the morale and generally unsettling the civilian population; and it was undoubtedly the intention of the enemy to do so."¹ He claims people welcomed news through the clandestine press, whether it was good or bad, noting the creators of the underground newspapers (based on the real men) "saw how relieved people were to know, to get genuine information, whether it was good or bad."² A letter written by someone in Lille and smuggled into Britain tells of the many hardships people in the occupied zone faced but noted, "the greatest deprivation is to not receive news."³ Perhaps more than other hardships, German control of news dissemination caused resentment among the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing. Sporadic mail service and German media control meant that the French people of the occupied zone suffered from a double lack of news: lack of news about loved ones fighting on the front or living in other parts of the country and information from a trustworthy medium. While it was extremely difficult for residents of the occupied Nord to gain information about individual loved ones, the clandestine press was able to bring news that was more general to the people, a task not without dangers.

¹ van der Meersch, 83.

² Ibid..85.

³ "La plus grande privation est de manquer de nouvelles." *Journal des réfugiés du Nord*, March 11, 1916.

The German occupiers placed the utmost importance on controlling information. Hence, they considered the production and distribution of clandestine newspapers as one of the most serious infractions a French civilian could commit, in gravity ranking perhaps just under hiding enemy soldiers. Conversely, the people of the occupied zone considered the men and women who produced the underground newspapers as some the greatest heroes of the time. Indeed, their story is one of bravery in the service of others.

Firmin Dubar, Abbé Pinte, and Joseph Willot aimed to break the German stranglehold on news distribution by providing the people of Roubaix and Tourcoing, and then Lille, an underground newspaper that could be trusted. Firmin Dubar was a well-known textile manufacturer and Abbé Pinte was a young priest. Joseph Willot was a chemistry teacher at the Roubaix technical institute and doctor of pharmacology at Lille University with his own laboratory in Roubaix. How these three men, with the help of many others, for a short time produced and distributed a clandestine newspaper in the occupied cities is a fantastic part of the story of news availability in the occupied zone. Not surprisingly, considering that each issue of the newspaper carried the request that readers incinerate it after reading, copies of every issue no longer exist. What is perhaps more surprising is how many copies survive. For the purpose of this study, I was able to locate and consult twenty-eight issues of the clandestine press. The clandestine press in the occupied zone produced numerous papers under different names with their editors and writers never identified on the papers. However, the Dubar-Pinte-Willot groups, aided by a consistent staff, produced all these papers and while the newspaper name changed frequently for security reasons, in reality all were the same newspaper. The newspaper appeared under the following names: *Le Journal des occupés... innocupés*,

Patience, Nouvelles françaises, Echo de France, Voix de la Patrie, L'Hirondelle de France, Courrier de France, L'Oiseau de France, L'Oiseau, and La Prudence. Some issues carried no name, but were similar enough in format and style to identify their origin with the Dubar-Pinte-Willot group. For this dissertation, I consulted the only major collection still in existence of the clandestine press, saved at the Archives Départementales du Nord. This collection includes nine issues of *L'Oiseau de France*, seven issues of *La Patience*, four issues of *La Voix de la Patrie*, four untitled issues, one issue of *L'Echo de France*, one issue of *Nouvelle française*, and one issue of *L'Oiseau*. There also exist printed reproductions of newspaper articles from banned newspapers that appear to have been printed utilizing a machine sometimes used for the abovementioned newspapers. As shall be discussed later in the chapter, there were other, minor, examples of clandestine printed media produced in the occupied zone during the war, but there is no concrete evidence suggesting who created these items and so they must be dealt with separately.

Producing the Newspapers

The story of the clandestine press began when Abbé Pinte assembled a makeshift radio receiver in his living quarters, utilizing a telephone wire on the roof as the aerial. He hid the radio when not in use behind the paneling around his bed.⁴ Firmin Dubar encouraged the priest to attempt building the device, knowing that before the war Pinte had gained experience with the wireless transmitter owned by the Roubaix technical

⁴ McPhail, 126.

institute seized by the Germans at the time of occupation.⁵ On October 24, 1914, Pinte received the first news reports on his radio from unoccupied France, transmissions from the Eiffel Tower and the English station at Poldhu. The War Ministry had established a military station at the Eiffel Tower, utilizing it to send out both military communications and news reports imbued with the same style of propaganda that their written communiqués contained. Likewise, the British government took control of the station in Poldhu, Cornwall, utilizing it both for naval communications and to issue daily war bulletins. Pinte dutifully listened to the 3pm and 11pm war bulletins. He quickly shared the news he received with a chosen few, including the departmental prefect, Félix Trépont, the bishop, Mgr. Charost, Senator Dron, Professor Clamette, and of course Firmin Dubar and Joseph Willot.⁶ Just listening to the radio was dangerous, and from the start, Pinte risked discovery by the Germans. As a chemistry professor at the Institute, Pinte chose to live at the school, his apartment in the technical institute linked to the military prisoners' room, and German sentries almost continuously patrolled outside his door.⁷ As Pinte felt the pressure mounting and believed continuing from his room would lead to capture, he decided to move his radio equipment to a space behind the altar in a chapel, located along the same corridor. He made the transfer, carrying the radio in a suitcase past several sentries. He continued receiving transmissions for two more years, despite the fact that the Germans suspected the Institute and searched it eleven times.⁸

At first, the men disseminated news via word of mouth to important, trustworthy people. However, word of mouth news dissemination could only reach a limited number

⁵ Bernard Girelle and Jean-Paul Visse, "La presse clandestine pendant la Première Guerre mondiale," *L'abeille: Journal de la société des Amis de Panckoucke*, 1 (June 2005): 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷ McPhail, 131.

⁸ *Ibid.*

of people, and as information circulated orally to larger groups, it could become inaccurate.⁹ It was Firmin Dubar who began planning a newspaper, eventually commencing production on the mimeograph machine of his friend Joseph Delespant. On January 1, 1915, eighty copies of *Le Journal des occupés...inoccupés* appeared under the doors or were discreetly handed to the most important citizens of Roubaix.¹⁰ The second issue of the paper appeared January 13, with the third issue on January 24, and the fourth and fifth issues appearing on February 6 and February 23 respectively.¹¹ Joseph Willot played a key role. As a university professor and the senior pharmacist for the health service, the German authorities expected him to travel daily between Lille and Roubaix, which allowed him to pass information between the cities. Both Pinte and Willot worked for the health service in Roubaix, allowing them daily contact. Hence, Willot took on the role of distributing and gathering news in Lille while Pinte did the same in Roubaix. The group did not forget Tourcoing. No less a person than the chief of police and head of the French information services, M. Lenfant, collected and distributed news in the third city of the conurbation.¹²

Quickly the newspaper became an indispensable counterweight to the German produced news, however, with only fifty to eighty copies of each issue appearing, the number of copies were painfully insufficient. Furthermore, very few of those copies circulated beyond Roubaix. Willot believed it to be imperative to start a newspaper in Lille. Working with Pinte and Dubar, Willot published *La Patience* in Lille on February

⁹ Auguste Leman, "A la mémoire de M. Joseph Willot," *Bulletin de guerre des Facultés catholiques de Lille Revue Mensuelle*, 13 (1919): 607.

¹⁰ McPhail, 127.

¹¹ Grelle and Visse, 2.

¹² McPhail, 127. McPhail reports the name of Dubar's friend as Joseph Delespant, while Bernard Grelle and Jean-Paul Visse write that it was Joseph Delespaul, secretary of the Syndicat mixte. They also slightly diverge on the number of copies produced of the first issue; McPhail states eighty copies, while Grelle and Visse are less specific, claiming a few dozen copies.

23, 1915. This first issue was nineteen pages long and carried the same news as the Roubaix version of the paper.¹³ Willot chose to name the Lille newspaper *La Patience* to encourage the population to have continued patience and confidence that France and Britain would win the war. They continued to produce two newspapers until March 1915, when the three men decided to combine the Lille and Roubaix newspapers to limit the risks of detection, which doubled by producing separate newspapers. They met daily to prepare the issues, which at this point ran about twenty pages each. At this stage in the venture, they produced two-hundred and fifty copies per an issue, which meant an outlay of five to seven thousand sheets of paper per run.¹⁴

The newspaper team was not satisfied with only including news Pinte received via his radio. Along with a wide net of co-conspirators, (many of whose names are lost to history and others who are both remembered and were later incarcerated for their efforts), they actively collected news, both local and international. In an environment where newspapers from unoccupied France were very hard to come by, they managed regularly to include articles from *Le Figaro*, *Le Temps*, and *Le Petit Journal*. They secured French newspapers by stealing them from German officers, obtaining smuggled-in copies, or retrieving them from airplane drops. The clandestine newspapers also included local news, which, thanks to the strict German controls on travel and communicating with others, was also hard to gather. By April 1, 1915, over a dozen people worked to prepare each issue. Two priests from the Catholic University of Lille, Auguste Leman, and Délépine provided religious and economic coverage for the newspaper (Délépine also provided the artwork), while Dr. Calmette, director of the Pasteur Institute, provided

¹³ McPhail, 128. Again, McPhail and Grelle and Visse disagree. Grelle and Visse state that this first issue of the Lille newspaper was twenty-three pages long, with single-side printing.

¹⁴ Grelle and Visse, 2.

scientific coverage and acted as a sounding board for Willot. Joseph Willot's wife often contributed a women's page that aimed to provide morale support to mothers and wives with loved ones at the front.¹⁵

Printing these newspapers in secret posed considerable difficulties. One serious difficulty was attaining enough paper. The German authorities requisitioned paper on a regular basis.¹⁶ Fortunately, another industrialist (whose name is unknown today) had a large quantity of paper that he donated to the cause. Of the samples that still exist, the newspapers were usually printed on standard eight inch by eleven-inch paper of rather poor quality. Another problem for editors of the secret press was the actual printing press. Their original mimeograph machine proved inadequate for producing the larger number of copies they now wanted to produce. In February 1915, Paul Delmasure, a Roubaix industrialist who frequently helped distribute newspapers, provided a new mimeograph machine. That machine quickly proved inadequate to the task as well. By the spring of 1915, the group was facing new problems. The mimeograph machine created poor quality newspapers, with the master copy falling apart after eighty copies. The clarity of the print varied greatly, both from issue to issue and even within the same issue. A few issues were difficult to read because the print was faint, suggesting the mimeograph machine was running low on ink. The team printed one issue with type that was in poor condition, as "e"s looked like "o"s.

The quality of newspaper improved, however, when Madame Reboux, manager of the *Journal de Roubaix* offered a proper, pedal driven printing press, which Willot kept in a small room behind his laboratory on rue du Vieil Abreuvoir. With Edouard

¹⁵ Grelle and Visse, 3.

¹⁶ McPhail, 128.

Dutriux, a competent typesetter, on the team, production increased, and the newspaper expanded.¹⁷ This solution, however, was short-lived. German demands forced Reboux to take her printing press back in a vain attempt to escape detection. The Germans demanded a list of all workers in the printing business and took samples of the typeface of each press in an attempt to figure out who was publishing the underground newspapers that they managed to obtain. The Germans thus recognized the typeface of the clandestine newspaper as the same as that of Reboux's newspaper. Fortunately, within three days Willot found in Tourcoing a new printing press that the Germans did not know existed, and its owner, Georges Rohart de Valkenaere, allowed Willot to install it in his laboratory.¹⁸ This change in press meant the team could produce a newspaper in the same format and similar quality, but with a different typeface, one that the Germans could not trace. Indeed, the look of the publication even improved at this point. In the spring of 1915 the papers averaged twenty-pages, on 22 x 27cm paper, with two columns per page. Articles came one after another, separated by large titles. When space was available, the newspaper carried a table of contents, which the editors included in four of the issues consulted. A few issues even had supplements, suggesting that when the editorial team had the time and supplies to offer even more information, they did. When space was at a premium the editors utilized tricks to fit in as much news as possible, including abbreviating many common words to offer a lot of information in shortened newspapers. A women's page often appeared, and Henri Soubricas provided humorous illustrations

¹⁷ McPhail, 130.

¹⁸ Grelle and Visse, 3.

and caricatures of German soldiers. Father Delépine, professor of geography at the Catholic University of Lille frequently drew maps of the front for the newspaper.¹⁹

Cost of production was also an issue: the newspaper producers chose not to collect money from the readership, as this would have been difficult while maintaining their anonymity. The newspaper's front page frequently reminded readers that the newspaper was to be a free publication, hoping to avoid dishonest people from trying to make a profit by selling copies. One estimate suggests that producing the newspapers cost approximately 32,000 francs (in 1915 currency), paid by Willot and Dubar.²⁰ This amount refers only to materials and products they donated or bought; it does not include the people working on the paper who volunteered their time, or donated items. Perhaps the true largest cost of producing the clandestine press was the toll the constant stress took upon the people involved. Joseph Willot experienced extreme mental and physical stress, attempting to produce the underground newspaper while maintaining his façade as university professor co-operating with the German occupation authorities. He pursued academic contacts with German professors to sustain his alibi. To keep the Germans from requisitioning all of his paper he had to have an ongoing project to justify his supplies and his time. Indeed, in February 1916, he published *Le Guide médical des laboratoires*.²¹ Employment in production of this book also provided alibis for René Coq and Margueire Nollet, both of whom worked for Willot at the Institute and helped publish the underground newspapers.

The problem of disseminating news while not getting caught was evident in each newspaper issue, which advised readers to share the information in its pages with

¹⁹ Leman, 611.

²⁰ Grelle and Visse, 5.

²¹ Ibid., 3.

discretion and to burn all issues once they had been read. A note in one of the *Journal des occupés* best summed up news dissemination in the occupied zone, noting that, “under the régime of terror which we are undergoing, we must understand how to dare, but we must dare with caution, with moderation, and without rashness.”²² The German occupiers made it a top priority to discover the source of these newspapers. In March 1915, an official proclamation forbade the reading of any newspaper in Lille except for the *Gazette des Ardennes* and the *Bulletin de Lille*. Specialized German investigators with trained dogs ripped apart houses and businesses, looking for evidence of the underground newspapers.²³ During one of the earlier raids Dubar managed to hide the printing equipment at the Institute in a chimney flue of an old steam-driven machine, which, located behind the large flush water closet, appeared to be a drain. Another raid occurred on April 1, 1915. Four German officers arrived, interrupting the team in the midst of completing an issue meant for distribution later that day. Dubar sounded the special alarm bell to warn printers and folders to hide everything, while he took his time answering the door.²⁴ Amazingly, the Germans discovered no incriminating evidence, but clearly they suspected Dubar, for the next day, they requisitioned more than a thousand lengths of fabric from his stores.²⁵ The distributors of the clandestine press were also at risk of exposure. One distributor, Henri Soubricas, outsmarted the Germans, and avoided tram searches and the need for German-authorized passes by regularly walking from Roubaix to Lille with newspapers.

²² McPhail, 128.

²³ Ibid., 129.

²⁴ Ibid., 130.

²⁵ Ibid., 131.

German pressure affected the newspaper. April 1915 saw the last twenty-page edition; the paper from that point on usually contained only one or two pages (up until August some issues still contained ten to twelve pages) but with more frequent issues. The name of the newspaper changed frequently and at times the paper appeared without a name. In May 1915, the team changed the newspaper's name to *Les Nouvelles françaises*. In June, it became *L'Echo de France* and in July 1915, it changed again to *La Voix de la Patrie*. In August and September 1915, the newspaper carried the names *Le Courrier de France*, *La Voix de Patrie* (again), *La Confiance*, and *L'Hirondelle*. In October, it became *La Prudence*.

During the early fall of 1915 a few issues of the newspaper fell into German hands. To counter the danger of detection, the next issue proclaimed that French refugees in a neutral country produced the paper and sent it into the occupied zone. The team then made sure a copy of the issue with that statement reached German hands. In October, a French woman brought the German Kommandantur a copy of *La Prudence*. The Germans carefully searched Lille, but not Roubaix, the location of the printing press. This led Willot in October 1915 to suspend the newspaper. From this point forward, only a few bulletins, shared with a small circle of trusted people came out. Each copy carried a stamp declaring "French airmail" to protect readers who could claim to have just picked it up.²⁶ The newspaper shrank to one page with three columns, and it continued in this form until its end in 1916. Almost every issue carried a warning not to share the newspaper with others and to burn it once read. Most issues began by stating the paper's headquarters was "X," a locale outside the occupied zone. The newspaper asked that people not research the location, but simply know that it was outside the occupied zone

²⁶ McPhail, 133.

and the newspaper producers were French refugees originally from the occupied zone who bravely worked to bring the truth to people in the occupied zone.²⁷ The team attempted to make it truly appear that the newspaper came from outside the occupied zone.

The dating of newspapers also presented security risks to their editors. Only one of the newspapers consulted in the present research – the first issue published in Lille - carried an exact date of publication. One can assume the editors stopped using exact dates, instead leaving an underlined blank space where the day should have been, to cloud the issue of transportation time and the paper's publishing locale. Hence, several issues could carry the same date, it simply being a month and year. The dates on the official communiqués reproduced by the newspapers allow historians to place the newspapers in order, but not to determine an exact publication date for each issue.²⁸ Later, the editors identified the date by referring to how long it had been since the war began, providing dates such as Day 752.

Security concerns also underlay the editors' complaints in the newspaper of transportation problems. In a November 1915, issue, the editors blamed transportation difficulties in getting the papers past the German authorities and into the occupied zone for the reduced format and irregularity of the paper's appearance.²⁹ In a later issue, the editors promised that anytime something happened to change the military situation, they would drop this paper into the invaded area via airplane.³⁰ Moreover, throughout the existence of this clandestine newspaper, the editors included articles on the importance of

²⁷ *Nouvelles Françaises*, May 1915 a.

²⁸ For reference purpose in this paper, the month and year have been followed by a letter designation (created here) to place them in order.

²⁹ *L'Oiseau de France*, November 1915.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Day 796.

treating the paper like secret documents. In May 1915, the newspaper writers noted that rumors circulating that the Germans arrested the newspaper's editor were ridiculous, stating it would be just as easy for the Germans to stop the editors of the *Le Temps*, *Le Figaro*, or *Le Matin*.³¹ Still, the editors warned people to be careful. In a September issue, they lamented the carelessness of readers in a large city in the occupied zone that forced the newspaper producers to modify how they transported the paper. Trust nobody was the message. Apparently the editorial staff's requests were not completely heeded, for a later article in the newspaper noted that people committed serious transgressions, including reading the paper in public places, and talking about it in the streets and tramways, creating a dangerous atmosphere.³²

In October 1916, the Germans detained Dubar, suspecting his connection to the clandestine press. On October 21, 1916, a double agent named Lefebvre provided Germans with evidence that led to Pinte's arrest.³³ Unlike Pinte, the Germans released Dubar, who warned Willot, who then destroyed compromising papers. People encouraged Willot to leave occupied France. Willot had the means to repatriate to unoccupied France, but his wife was too ill to travel and he refused to leave without her. Immediately after Pinte's arrest, the Germans searched the Institute again, although workers, particularly Marguerite Nollet and her friend Antoinette Valentin, again successfully hid material. However, this time the Germans found incriminating evidence kept by the Institute's janitor, including a complete run of *L'Oiseau*, notes about the newspaper's publication in various people's handwriting, and a photograph of the entire

³¹ *La Patience*, May 1915 c.

³² *L'Oiseau de France*, Day 817.

³³ Grelle and Visse, 4.

newspaper team taken on Bastille Day 1916.³⁴ The Germans found the actual printing press and related material later that month. The Germans again detained Dubar. This time they interrogated him and placed him in solitary confinement. Although he did not reveal information about the newspaper staff, the Germans also arrested Willot's assistant, Marquerite Nollet. Surprisingly, Willot was still not a suspect and decided to print another issue using simple equipment. The Germans discovered a copy of a newspaper at the university, and descended on the campus but Willot was not there, although he was now a suspect. The police arrived at Willot's house while he again attempted another issue. Again, one of the press team hid the incriminating evidence from German eyes.

Willot did the only thing he could think of to clear his friends of suspicion: he printed one final issue. Five hundred copies, printed by Valkenaere in Tourcoing and distributed by Soubricas, proclaimed that the wrong people were under arrest.³⁵ The plan enjoyed some success; the Germans temporarily released Dubar and Nollet, but Pinte remained in prison. Returning to the newspaper name, *La Voix de la Patrie*, Willot attempted to print another issue, with the help of a Roubaix student, Jean-Baptiste Pennel, listening to Pinte's radio. However, on December 19, 1915 a surprise German raid on his laboratory caught Willot in the act of preparing the newspaper. The German authorities arrested Willot along with thirteen others.³⁶ The publishing team faced trial in April 1917. A few received acquittals, while the Germans sentenced the rest to prison terms either in German prisons, or in the case of Pinte, a Brussels prison. The main forces

³⁴ McPhail, 134.

³⁵ Grelle and Visse, 4.

³⁶ Those arrested included typesetter Wardavoir, Dutrieux, Coq, and Coq's wife, Firmin Dubar, typist Madeleine Delooz, Jean-Baptiste Pennel and his wife, Joséphine Mignaux (who like Pinte built a radio) and translator Cauet-Voreux. At the same time the Germans also arrested Willot's wife, a Monsieur and Madame Dispa, and Soubricas. Madame Dispa died in detention. Grelle and Visse, 4.

behind the newspaper received the harshest sentences; Firmin Dubar received a sentence of ten years and one month in isolation; Joseph Willot a sentence of ten years; Jules Pinte a sentence of ten years and six months; and Marquerite Nollet a sentence of two years and six months. While all endured and survived their prison terms until the Armistice, Willot died shortly after due to the hardship and strain of prison life.

Even with the main contributors to the underground newspaper in prison, Willot's wife continued their work. An electrician, Vandendriesche, installed a radio inside her home. The Germans always suspected her, and not only searched her house frequently but also forbade her to receive visitors. This did not stop her. When publishing news became too difficult, she relayed news via word of mouth until the end of the war. Upon their release from prison, Coq and Soubricas (who both received a few months' sentence) as well as Pennel and Valentin helped her. A series of articles published in *Le Progrès du Nord* after the war revealed that Madame Willot published about twenty-five issues of the paper after the Germans imprisoned her husband.³⁷

News in the Papers

The first issue of *Le Journal des occupés...inoccupés* stated the newspaper's producers were "As resolutely hostile to the foolish optimism which is blinded to truth and transforms the most obvious failures into victories, as to the destructive pessimism which, for fear of being surprised, can only believe in depressing news."³⁸ To this end, the team worked to produce as professional a newspaper as possible. However, with their main sources being French and British, often they were simply offering propaganda from

³⁷ Grelle and Visse, 5.

³⁸ McPhail, 127.

a different point of view, albeit a more palatable one from the point of view of the occupied. The editorial team frequently identified the sources of articles, noting the newspaper in which the articles originally appeared and sometimes their authors. Articles from important journalists in unoccupied France, such as Alfred Capus and Maurice Barrès appeared relatively frequently. Willot and the editing team always signed articles they wrote with an “X.” Willot and his team also provided balanced coverage of the war by providing excerpts from different newspapers on the same topic. For example, in April 1915, the editors put together a piece on British and American coverage of the Germans sinking steamboats. The piece included brief excerpts from the *Westminster Gazette*, *The Times*, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, *The Globe*, *New York Herald*, and *New York World*.³⁹ While none of the articles represented the German point of view and hence was not an unbiased account, the sampling counter-balanced the voluminous submarine coverage in *La Gazette des Ardennes* and *Le Bruxellois*. Most news provided by the clandestine press can be divided into five categories: battle news and information about the war, in particular good news for the French; news that was negative for the Germans; articles that demonstrated world opinion was against Germany; news from unoccupied France; and news from the occupied zone.

Battle News

People in the occupied zone longed for battle news from a French point of view, and the clandestine press provided it. This came in the form of official French communiqués taken from newspapers in unoccupied France, and in sections entitled “Review of the Main War Events of the Week” which were taken from French and

³⁹ *La Patience*, n. 8, April 1915.

foreign newspapers, and in “The Situation in the Last Hour.”⁴⁰ The editors tried to cram as much news into these sections as possible. The newspaper always began with battle coverage and news from the fronts of northern France. The first issues began updating people on battles immediately. For example, in January 1915, the newspaper provided details of fighting around the River Yser and gave detailed, relatively accurate, accounts of fighting around the Soissons.⁴¹ Reports such as these continued and included detailed information about trenches taken, areas bombed, and German soldiers taken prisoner. One article, entitled “Conquering the Labyrinth,” depicted the danger and hardship attached to taking enemy trenches, as it told of the May 30th through June 19th battle to take German trenches between Neuville-Saint-Vaast and Ecurie.⁴² The article concluded on a positive but relatively unbiased note, stating that the Germans not only lost their trenches, but the entire 161st regiment, with the French taking approximately a thousand prisoners and killing the rest. However, it also reports that the French army sustained two thousand casualties in the fight.⁴³

Each issue contained three to five days’ worth of communiqués. If readers compared these newspapers’ communiqués from the front with those the German-controlled press provided in its newspapers, they found not only contradictions of detail, but even more frequently that the editors of the French and German organs simply concentrated on different parts of the extensive front where the war was going well for their side. The newspaper’s editors tried to reassure a readership sensitive to the insertion of propaganda into reports, providing an article from the Dutch newspaper the *Telegraaf*,

⁴⁰ Revue des Principaux faits de Guerre de la Semaine and la Situation en Dernière Heure.

⁴¹ McPhail, 135. As the newspaper editors’ sources were French, they contained the same limited information available to French newspapers in unoccupied France.

⁴² “La Conquête du Labyrinthe,” *La Voix de la Patrie*, July 1915 a.

⁴³ Ibid.

stating that communiqués reporting the success of French armies north and south of Arras as well as between Oise and Aisne were accurate and honest.⁴⁴ Coverage extended to every front, including the aerial and naval wars. The newspaper also extensively covered the Eastern Front, which experienced more movement during this time.

Not only did the newspaper carry news from the Russian front, but also insight into Russian strategies. For example, in a reprint of a *New York World* article, Russian War Minister Poliwanow explained that the Russian army chose to retreat to Warsaw to deny the Germans the quick battle they wanted, and instead tire the German soldiers by forcing them to march prior to the fight.⁴⁵ By the fall of 1915, the Russians retreated beyond Warsaw, establishing a stabilized frontline running from Riga to the Romanian border. The shortening of the front meant that Russian manpower was sufficient to hold the line, and the chase across Eastern Europe and the stretching of their supply lines to their limits did exhaust the Germans.⁴⁶ What the article featured in the clandestine press did not mention was the artillery and ammunition left behind during the Russian retreat, as well as the huge territory and hundreds of thousands of prisoners lost to the Germans.⁴⁷ The newspaper acknowledged that the Balkan situation was complex, and provided readers with a detailed article analyzing the Balkan state of affairs.⁴⁸ Taken from *Le Temps*, the article portrayed the Balkans, already plagued with multiple groups with conflicting national aspirations, as falling victim to Austrian-German ambition.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁴ *La Voix de la Patrie*, July 1915 a.

⁴⁵ *Le Courier de France*, August 1915.

⁴⁶ David R. Stone, *A Military History of Russia: From Ivan the Terrible to the War in Chechnya* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 165.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *La Voix de la Patrie*, July 1915 c.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

article, talking about the aims of different countries for the Balkan area, juxtaposes Austria and Germany's treatment against the French desire for independence for the area.

News about the South African and Canadian volunteers entering the war and British munitions production provided small but important details proving the strength of the French and British endeavor.⁵⁰ Italian war efforts also received substantial notice. Almost every story offered hope of the British and French side winning the war in an attempt to counteract German propaganda in the form of false or exaggerated battle reports. For example, in late February 1915 the Germans announced their remarkable victory over the Russians in the winter battle of Masuria. Pinte, relying on news received from the Eiffel Tower, was unable to find confirmation of this victory, and passed along news denying the great German victory, heartening the French population.⁵¹ Neither version received in the occupied cities was entirely accurate. The German commanders on the Eastern Front, Paul von Hindenburg and his chief of staff Erich Ludendorff, planned a "knockout blow" against Russia. On February 7, 1915, the German Eighth Army struck east against the Russian Tenth Army standing north of the Masurian Lakes.⁵² During a heavy snowstorm, the Germans took the Russians by surprise; as the Russians began falling back, the German Tenth Army assaulted them from the north. All four Russian corps seemed on the brink of annihilation. The brave resistance of the Russian XX corps in the Forest of Augustrow enabled the other three corps to escape. The XX corps did eventually surrender to the Germans on February 21, 1915. German combat losses were light, but numerous German soldiers suffered harshly from

⁵⁰ *La Patience*, n. 6, March 1915; *La Voix de la Patrie*, July 1915 c; *La Voix de la Patrie*, July 1915 b.

⁵¹ McPhail, 128.

⁵² David Eggenberger, *An Encyclopedia of Battles: Accounts of Over 1,560 Battles from 1479 B.C. to the Present* (Mineola, N.Y.: Courier Dover Publications, 1985), 270.

exposure.⁵³ While the winter battle of Masuria was not the great victory the Germans claimed it to be with the occupied population, it was still a minor German victory.

During the summer of 1916, the newspaper provided detailed coverage of Verdun, noting the French recapture of le Morte-Homme and the Fort de Vaux, events the German-controlled newspapers did not report.⁵⁴ The Germans captured le Morte-Homme earlier in 1916, rendering the French vulnerable at the salient around Fort Moulainville.⁵⁵ The Germans fought for months to gain this high ground, with "...the grim weeks of seesaw battle over control of le Morte Homme have exact[ing] a dreadful toll [in terms of casualties]."⁵⁶ The editors of the clandestine press shared relevant battle news the Germans were withholding when they reported that General Philippe Pétain launched a successful offensive, recapturing le Morte Homme.⁵⁷ The fighting for Fort Vaux, the smallest fortress of the Verdun fortifications was equally brutal, with French soldiers enduring siege conditions prior to the Germans taking the fort. The clandestine press may have been premature in reporting the French retaking the fort however, as it was only on November 2, 1916, after five days of bombardment by French artillery, that the German garrison finally abandoned the fort during the night.⁵⁸ Thanks to the clandestine press, many in the occupied zone knew that the Germans never completely captured the city of Verdun, despite German-controlled newspapers proclaiming it.⁵⁹ Through the Eiffel Tower transmissions, Abbé Pinte was also able to confirm the

⁵³ Ibid., 270.

⁵⁴ McPhail, 133.

⁵⁵ Burg and Purcell, 118.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 180.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 143.

⁵⁹ McPhail, 133.

stalemate along the Allied front line.⁶⁰ Readers were able to catch up on any war information they missed before the inception of the clandestine press, as the newspaper included the “Official History of the War,” series originally published in *The Times* in July 1915.⁶¹ Of course, since a large portion of its news came from French newspapers, the clandestine press administered to its readers its own dose of propaganda, this time from the French point of view.

Negative Information About the German War Cause

Not surprisingly, the German-controlled press in the occupied zone provided very little information that presented their war effort in a negative light. The clandestine press offered a great deal of news to counteract German propaganda that the war was going the German way and that people in Germany were resilient. Many articles told of heavy German and Austrian losses on the battlefield, while others explained why victory was impossible for the two countries.”⁶² The newspaper staff reported the naval battle of Dogger Bank and the sinking of the German warship *Blücher*, deeming this a major setback for the German navy.⁶³ It was not the complete British victory the British and French media proclaimed, as three of the four German ships escaped, however it did have serious repercussions for the Germans. Wilhelm II and the Naval general staff made major personnel changes in the leadership of the High Sea Fleet and became more cautious in deploying Fleet as a result.⁶⁴ The newspaper’s editors reported problems on the enemies’ home fronts as well. One quick blurb informed readers that numerous

⁶⁰ Ibid.,126-7.

⁶¹ “Historique officiel de la Guerre,” Leman, 608.

⁶² “Bulletin de la Semaine”, *La Patience*, April 1915 a.

⁶³ McPhail,135.

⁶⁴ Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War One* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1994), 46.

people in Austria-Hungary were dying from cholera.⁶⁵ This statement appears to be true, if exaggerated. A cholera epidemic occurred in Hungary in 1913 and outbreaks again occurred during the war in both Hungary and Austria in areas around prisoner of war camps housing Russian prisoners.⁶⁶ However, these outbreaks do not compare to the cholera epidemic Austria-Hungary endured during the Austro-Prussian War. In 1866 approximately 165,000 deaths due to cholera occurred in the two countries.⁶⁷

A longer article, taken from the *Daily Telegraph*, examined German morale at home. Reporting from Rotterdam, the journalist remarked that everyone in Germany, from the public to government officials were worried and demonstrated great anxiety.⁶⁸ Francis March, in his work, *World War One: History of the World War*, includes a line graph depicting the state of German civilian morale. He arbitrarily regards morale as standing at one hundred percent in August 1914, and at zero at the end of the war, a point at which an effective majority of the German people refused to support the war. In the fall of 1916, when this article appeared in the clandestine press, German civilian morale hovered at approximately sixty percent on the line graph, having been in decline since October of the previous year.⁶⁹

Another article the editors published reported that German threats of regular zeppelin attacks on England were German distress cries in a war they were losing.⁷⁰ That the clandestine press associated a potential increase in German zeppelin attacks on

⁶⁵ *La Patience*, n. 7, April 1915.

⁶⁶ Dhiman Barua, "History of Cholera," *Cholera*, Dhiman Barua and William B. Greenough III, eds. (New York: Plenum Publishing, 1992), 15.

⁶⁷ Andrew Price-Smith, *Contagion and Chaos: Disease, Ecology, and National Security in the Era of Globalization* (Boston: MIT, 2009), 174.

⁶⁸ "L'Anxiété en Allemagne," *L'Oiseau de France*, Day 752.

⁶⁹ Francis A. March, *World War One: History of the World War, Complete Edition*. Vol. 4 (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 158-9.

⁷⁰ *La Voix de la Patrie*, September 1915.

England with Germany losing the war, demonstrates that some of its news contained blatant Allied propaganda, in the this case British. This article appeared before Britain developed defenses, such as incendiary bullets that later in the war would render zeppelin raids ineffective. In the fall of 1915, “the specter of these great leviathans of the air sowing the seeds of death and destruction in the streets of London...” was still a real fear, with bad weather being Britain’s greatest weapon in stopping the zeppelins from bombing its cities.⁷¹ While zeppelin attacks resulted in only moderate damage in England, their psychological effect on the British home front in 1915 was profound. This article represented brave talk in the face of fear, something readers most likely would have recognized. Borrowing a tactic from the German-controlled press in the occupied zone, the clandestine press included articles about sections of the German government wanting peace, including one that claimed the Chancellor had sanctioned a socialist public appeal to end the war.⁷² Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg would publicly indicate his support for a negotiated peace a year later, but the Allies rejected his request, potentially because they realized German military leadership did not support Hollweg’s stance.⁷³

The clandestine press also covered the desperation of the German military to garner supplies, running an article stating that the Germans mobilized their churches to requisition metals. Clergy were supposed to both encourage their congregations to hand in metal, as well as to hand over all metal items that belonged to the churches.⁷⁴ While not explicitly stated in the article, this news surely supported the French belief that the

⁷¹ Ian Castle, *London 1914-17: The Zeppelin Menace* (Oxford: Osprey, 2008), 6, 17.

⁷² *L’Echo de France*, June 1915.

⁷³ Ross F. Collins, *World War I* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008), 374.

⁷⁴ *Le Courier de France*, August 1915.

Germans were sacrilegious barbarians, for who else would ransack their own churches for the war effort? Biased editorializing, perhaps, but the basis of the news article was accurate. Germany needed metal reserves. Calling for self-sacrifice to overcome metal shortages, particularly copper, Wilhelm II promised to melt down some of his own monuments. In May 1915, the Prussian Ministry of War began to deal systematically with metal shortages. It requisitioned metal objects such as kitchen utensils and church bells. More than 40,000 churches and religious institutions relinquished items, and by January 1918, German authorities took half of all church bells in Germany.⁷⁵ Another article focused upon the cost of living in Germany, and in particular in Silesia, where potatoes had skyrocketed to the equivalent of thirty-seven francs a pound and ham to 15 francs a pound (in 1915 currency).⁷⁶ The cost of living rose to twelve times pre-war levels in Germany during the war, as compared to it rising by a factor of three in the United States, four in Britain, and seven in France.⁷⁷ Silesia, as one of Germany's main industrial centers, felt the rise in the cost of living, as wage increases did not match the increase in the cost of living.

No piece of bad news for the Germans was too small to report. For example, a brief article ran in the paper telling of the Spanish government interring Moulay Hafid, the former sultan of Morocco, who expressed pro-German sympathies.⁷⁸ The article did not mention the fact that Moulay Hafid was most likely still receiving a French pension paid since he abdicated as sultan of the French protectorate of Morocco. Like other

⁷⁵ Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Past: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 78-9.

⁷⁶ *La Voix de la Patrie*, July 1915 c.

⁷⁷ Paul Bookbinder, *Weimar Germany: The Republic of the Reasonable* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 164.

⁷⁸ *L'Oiseau de France*, Day 809.

French media, the tone of the clandestine press did approach gloating when reporting Germany's woes. This is not surprising, considering how the French viewed the Germans during the war. These clandestine newspapers frequently referred to France's "hereditary enemy," stating that Germany was looking to complete a conquest that began in 1870.⁷⁹ Deborah Buffton notes that the memory of 1870 was particularly strong among the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, as they believed that if Germany won the war, the Germans would annex their towns, just as they had Alsace and Lorraine.⁸⁰

World Opinion against the Germans.

The clandestine press provided moral support to its readers, letting them know that much of the world was on France's side. Several articles in the underground newspaper detailed the world's disgust with Germany's behavior, including certain groups in neutral countries, such as professors, judges, lawyers, and the public in Holland.⁸¹ Rising tensions between the Germans and Americans also received ample attention. One article outlined a back and forth between the Kaiser and President Wilson over the German use of submarines, providing analysis noting that the German leader demonstrated a lack of judgment by utilizing aggressive language with the Americans.⁸² Another issue of the paper included two reports, one noting that President Wilson asked the Austrian government to recall its ambassador to the United States because he was attempting to ferment strikes in American munitions factories, and another taken from the Dutch newspaper the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* claiming that German-American

⁷⁹ Buffton, 229.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 231.

⁸¹ *La Patience*, April 1915 b.

⁸² *L'Oiseau de France*, Day 641.

relations were more tenuous than ever before.⁸³ By the fall of 1915, events strained German-American relations. The German sinking of the passenger liner *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915, while it was carrying American passengers and the German reaction to the incident soured relations. On June 8, 1915, American Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan resigned because he believed President Woodrow Wilson's strong protests against the German response to the incident and their general war policy could lead to the United States entering the war.⁸⁴ By the beginning of 1916, the War Press Office in Germany had to clear any mention of German-American relations.⁸⁵ Of course, German-American relations were to deteriorate even further; the March 1917 Zimmerman Telegram incident led directly to war.

Other articles told of Americans' sympathy for the French cause and their abhorrence of the first of two German campaigns of unrestricted submarine warfare.⁸⁶ The clandestine press made its readers aware of the submarine attacks by the Germans, including coverage of the sinking of the *Falaba*, although in the issues consulted no connection was made between the sinking of this British ship headed to West Africa and American anger over one of its citizens being killed.⁸⁷

The clandestine press also reported that the German secretly admired the French military. A reprinted article from the *Daily Telegraph* reported that a German army major

⁸³ *La Voix de la Patrie*, September 1915. The *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* was a Dutch newspaper whose editors were decidedly pro-German during the First World War. In 1915 the newspaper's publishers were confident that Germany would win the war, but conceded that the Europe that would exist after the victory, would look like Hell. Van Tuyll van Serooskerken, 147.

⁸⁴ Lester H. Brune and Richard Dean Burns, *Chronological History of U.S. Foreign Relations: 1607-1932* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 365.

⁸⁵ Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 222. Since all printed news had to be cleared by the War Press Office, this statement suggests that German leadership ordered censors to pay special attention to articles reporting on German-American relations.

⁸⁶ *La Voix de la Patrie*, July 1915 c and *La Patience* n.7, April 1915.

⁸⁷ *La Patience*, n.7, April 1915.

taken prisoner stated that the French military never ceased to show great determination and courage.⁸⁸ Another article, taken from the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, stated that the German press was impressed with how the French in the occupied zone kept their morale up, and compared it to the deplorable spirit of the Germans on the home front.⁸⁹ This statement bore out the truth, as the German home front moved towards collapse and all the French in the occupied zone could control was their morale and dignity.⁹⁰ However, unlike the journalists, the occupied French people's aloofness and pride angered rather than impressed some of the more perceptive German soldiers.

News from Unoccupied France

The clandestine press attempted to provide readers with information from unoccupied France. A lot of this information concerned the French government, financing the war, and French industry. The newspaper included coverage of political speeches, such as that by Prime Minister Briand declaring politics in France had only one aim – victory.⁹¹ The newspaper staff included political news from France whenever possible, such as when Minister of War Millerand received a check for four million francs to buy war supplies.⁹² The newspaper informed readers of the Bank of France's gold reserve status in one article and attempts to minimize the imports of raw materials in another.⁹³ The newspaper covered politicians' public events, including Poincaré's trip to the front and various politicians' trips to munitions factories. The clandestine press also

⁸⁸ *L'Echo de France*, June 1915.

⁸⁹ *L'Oiseau de France*, Day 796.

⁹⁰ McPhail, 2, 187.

⁹¹ *L'Oiseau de France*, November 1915.

⁹² McPhail, 135.

⁹³ *Le Courier de France*, August 1915 and *L'Oiseau de France*, day 798.

included political and domestic news from France's allies. A report on British Minister of Munitions Lloyd George's speech to Welsh miners fighting on the Italian front was even accompanied by an illustration of the prime minister in a special supplement.⁹⁴ The state of Russia and England's economy and war effort also received coverage in the newspaper, with Russian munitions production receiving particular attention.⁹⁵

Some of the news provided by the underground press from unoccupied France dealt with life in the occupied zone. One such article was "To Women of the Nord."⁹⁶ Composed as a letter, signed from "a French woman," it tells the women of the occupied zone that women in unoccupied France write to their husbands and fathers fighting on the front, and they do so like mothers writing to their sons. This knowledge, that the men from the occupied zone fighting at the front receive caring letters despite their families' inability to send them from German occupied France, was supposed to comfort the women of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing. The same letter reported that recent evacuees had a good trip and were now on French land, as their compatriots received them with tenderness.⁹⁷ Another article provided even greater detail about people evacuated from the occupied zone to Paris. The article provided insight into the life of refugees after they left the land of barbarians, including information about the Parisian neighborhoods in which they congregated.⁹⁸ Evacuees from the tri-city area arrived in France via Switzerland, enduring what was often an exhausting journey, taking several days with

⁹⁴ *La Voix de la Patrie*, September 1915.

⁹⁵ *Le Courier de France*, August 1915.

⁹⁶ "Aux Femmes du Nord," *La Patience*, April 1915.

⁹⁷ The accuracy of this article is suspect, as many historians have noted that refugees from the Nord were not always warmly welcomed. People in unoccupied France saw the refugees as a strain on the economy and as infected by the boche and thus very different from other Frenchmen.

⁹⁸ *L'Echo de France*, June 1915.

people crammed into trains. News in this article that people arrived safely and in good health would have been very welcome to the readers of the clandestine press.

News From Within Occupied Zones.

While the *Bulletin de Lille* and the *Journal de Roubaix* provided some coverage of news occurring in occupied zone, the clandestine press supplemented that coverage. The German occupiers attempted to isolate towns from each other, letting little news from Lille reach Roubaix and Tourcoing, and vice versa.⁹⁹ The underground press covered other areas of the occupied zone. At least one story expressed anger towards another occupied area, namely Brussels. An article written by a member of the clandestine press team (as opposed to one taken from another newspaper) stated that life in Brussels was close to normal; tramways ran late into the night, the cost of living remained average, and cafés, movie theaters, and music halls were full of Belgians and Germans alike. Indeed, the article noted that in Brussels it was not strange for German officers and Belgians to socialize in cafés, a concept that would be scandalous in Lille or Roubaix.¹⁰⁰ These statements were far from accurate; yet they appeared to be a rumor that had wide circulation in occupied France during the war. The reality was that the Germans plundered Belgium with great thoroughness, and the more authoritarian the Germans acted, the more stubbornly the Belgians resisted.¹⁰¹ The occupation of Belgium was so brutal that Brand Whitlock, the American Ambassador to Belgium during the war,

⁹⁹ This practice was not simply standard German operational procedure, but something unique to occupied France. Many German-controlled newspapers produced in Belgium, contained regular news from other cities in that occupied country. Hence, while the Belgian German-controlled papers were available in occupied France, readers in Lille could receive news from various Belgian cities, but not Roubaix and Tourcoing.

¹⁰⁰ *La Voix de le Patrie*, September 1915.

¹⁰¹ Zuckerman, 91, 99.

described it as a “slow poisoning for the purpose of enslavement.”¹⁰² It is interesting to speculate how the editors – educated, intelligent men – could believe that life in Brussels could be so much better. Perhaps the glimpse they received into Belgian life via the German-controlled imported newspapers from Brussels convinced them life there was less harsh.

Articles about the occupied zone sometimes provided support, and sometimes reminded people of their difficult patriotic duty. Support came in the form of an article noting that Carnival in 1915 would not be a party, without even the flour necessary to make the traditional crêpes, but that the people of the Nord were strong and would get through the occupation if they had patience.¹⁰³ Many people in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing kept pigeons before the war as pets, something the German occupiers quickly forbade for fear the French would use the birds to communicate with the outside world. Hence an article in the first issue of the Lille version of the paper, telling of pigeons living happily in the trees of Lille, must have brought comfort to many.¹⁰⁴ The editors of the clandestine press were also quick to remind people of their patriotic duty. A long article urged people not to exchange their gold for city vouchers, noting that this was simply giving resources to the Germans that could be transformed into enemy cannons and munitions that would kill fathers and brothers in the French trenches.¹⁰⁵ The tone of the message was harsh and uncompromising, especially considering the hardship people in the cities endured if they did not have money to buy items at their newly elevated,

¹⁰² Ibid., 117. Another source that provides amply ammunition to shoot down the account of Belgians convivially drinking with Germans in Brussels is Jeff Lipkes’ *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2007).

¹⁰³ *La Patience*, n.1, February 23, 1915.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ *Le Courier de France*, August 1915.

wartime prices. The newspaper frequently encouraged readers not to work for the Germans, despite the suffering such resistance brought to people who followed this advice.

The editors of the clandestine press frequently wrote articles about the occupied zone that revealed aspects of life that the Germans would not allow discussed publicly. For example, one article explained how German requisition demands were illegal according not only to international law but also to also German law.¹⁰⁶ Another article let readers know that government officials in unoccupied France were aware that the German military systematically took machinery and raw materials from the occupied zone and transported it to Germany.¹⁰⁷ The newspaper producers were not afraid to mock the German occupiers. A March 1915 issue *La Patience* included a poem entitled “The Ten Commandments of Von Heinrich.”¹⁰⁸ The poem humorously pointed out the German Governor of Lille’s attempts to control even the most mundane aspects of life, including the lines, “The worst of falsehoods shalt thou swallow / Without the least reproach/ Thou shalt accept the situation / or else look out for retribution!”¹⁰⁹

Other Underground Newspapers?

Not included in the above discussion of the clandestine press are several copies of newsheets, newspaper articles, and reproductions of speeches. For example, French archives preserved a half dozen hand-written and typed copies of the *Gazette de Cologne*, found in what was the occupied zone after the war. Did the same people or others

¹⁰⁶ *L’Oiseau de France*, day 752.

¹⁰⁷ *La Voix de la Patrie*, July 1915 a.

¹⁰⁸ “Le dix commandements de Von Heinrich.” *La Patience*, n.6, March 1915.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* As three words in the newspaper issue consulted were too blurry to read, this translation is taken from McPhail, 130.

attempting to disseminate news produce these sheets? Were they intended for private consumption or passed around? Were the undated ones the work of Madame Willot? One news bulletin was thirty-six pages long and appeared somewhat similar to Willot's clandestine publications, but not similar enough to say with certainty that she produced it.

Other people claimed to have produced underground newspapers in the tri-city area during the war. Jules Eucher, a Roubaisien professor of stenography claimed that during October 1917 he produced and distributed a clandestine newspaper entitled *Les Feuilles jaunes*.¹¹⁰ While no copies exist to prove his story, he claimed that he provided extracts from French and British newspapers as well as information from radio reports. He did spend one month in prison under the Germans. Others have made similar claims that cannot be proved or disproved. What is known is that the clandestine press provided the inspiration for like-minded people to start another underground newspaper during the German occupation of the Second World War, *Les Petites Ailes de France*.

Conclusion

As the risks mounted for Willot, Rector Margerin of the Catholic University of Lille told Willot that God did not require him to take these risks, and asked Willot if he had the right to chance making his wife a widow and his children orphans. Willot responded a few days later, saying he had talked to his wife, and she urged him to continue.¹¹¹ And continue he did for as long as possible. The timing of the fall of the clandestine press was unfortunate; Annette Becker cites a weakening of morale at the end of 1916 that grew worse until the summer of 1917, which brought a return of hope and a

¹¹⁰ Bernard Grelle and Jean-Paul Visse, "La presse clandestine pendant la Première Guerre mondiale," *L'abeille: Journal de la Société des Amis de Panckouche* 1 (June 2005), 6.

¹¹¹ Leman, "A la mémoire de M. Joseph Willot," 615.

spirit of resolution.¹¹² The timing of the highs and lows of morale were quite divorced from war events. This could suggest that while the people in the occupied cities were receiving news, that information did not relay to them the large significance of certain events, leading to a misunderstanding of how the war was going for the Allied side. Perhaps more likely, internal events caused the ebbs and flows of morale. At the end of 1916, the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing had experience over two years of horrible occupation. By the summer of 1917, the occupiers were beginning to feel and show the strain, a factor that may have bolstered the occupied.

While many historians lament that the ordeals of occupation suffered by northern France are often left out of the narrative of France's experience during the war, their nation did recognize the work of the resisters. After the war, France bestowed the *Ordre de la Nation* upon Marquerite Nollet and Madame Willot. Willot (posthumously), Pinte, and Dubar received the *Croix de la Légion d'Honneur*. In 1920, the Académie Française honored all involved by awarding the Prix Buisson, founded in 1889 to recognize works resulting from righteousness and virtue, to *L'Oiseau de France*.¹¹³

While historians extol the bravery of the men and women who worked to provide the citizens of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing with news they could trust, one does have to admit that the audience was a privileged group of readers. Owing to the difficulty of keeping the press a secret from the Germans, people were not encouraged to share the news they received. The clandestine papers had a wide but favored circle of readers consisting largely of persons known to the middle and upper class professionals who produced the newsheets. It is difficult to say how much news trickled down to poorer

¹¹² Becker, "Life in an Occupied Zone: Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing," 632.

¹¹³ McPhail, 135.

residents and those without connections to the cities' leaders. However, there are indications that news from the underground press did reach a wider audience at times. On at least one occasion, the newspaper was read from a church pulpit.¹¹⁴ Auguste Leman also cited people's indiscriminate reading of the newspaper in cafés, tramways, and even in the streets as one of the reasons why publication was temporarily suspended in November 1915.¹¹⁵ Copies were even found as far away as Douai, Tournai, and Brussels.

Every editor makes decisions about what information to include. The clandestine press demonstrated a definite bias towards news that would uplift morale. These articles focused upon the successes of France and its allies, growing global distrust of the Germans, and unrest within Germany. It is a matter of historical debate whether this was propaganda as well, or if it simply made sense to publish the news that the German-controlled papers would not, to provide balance. When the clandestine press was available, people did not have to read the German-controlled newspapers for war news. However, the secret press did not stop people from reading the other papers, as they were still a source of information on prisoners, the latest German regulations, and local news. Like the German-controlled press, the underground newspapers frequently included brief pieces of news from various places. However, the producers would have balked at any comparison, having declared the German-controlled press part of the German industry of lies.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 133.

¹¹⁵ Leman, "A la mémoire de M. Joseph Willot," 614.

¹¹⁶ *Le Courier de France*, August 1915.

Chapter Eleven:

Other Sources:

Less Influential Publications Available in the Occupied Cities

The aim of this dissertation is to discover what news was available in occupied Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing during the First World War by examining all the news sources available. To be a truly thorough examination, this must include sources that the French people of those cities did not regularly read, but that were at times available. Some sources were available only sporadically, such as smuggled newspapers from unoccupied France. The difficulty and danger involved with attaining these newspapers made them a relative rarity. Later in the war, airplanes and then air balloons dropped newspapers produced in France and England for the occupied territory. The Germans within the occupied territory made it a priority to intercept these newspapers and severely punish anyone caught with one. Combined with the need for good weather and favorable wind to drop the newspapers, these too were a rare treat for the occupied French. German language newspapers were relatively easy to obtain, but were not widely read. Few Frenchmen at this time in these industrial cities could read German and these newspapers just provided more news from a German perspective, hence they did not become a regular source of news for the French.

Even though the focus of this work is news available through newspapers, it is worthwhile to briefly consider the books and pamphlets the Germans tried to sell to the occupied French. It is safe to assume that these books did not sell for two reasons.

Firstly, all the books had as their basic premise the strength and righteousness of Germany and its war effort. Secondly, the occupied people had little disposable income with which to purchase items. However, if we are to attempt to understand what information was available in the occupied cities, all sources of news much be considered.

Little Treasures: Newspapers from Unoccupied France

Despite the German authorities' best efforts, some newspapers from outside the occupied territory did make their way into Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing. Auguste Leman described receiving newspapers from the motherland as comforting but irregular, and the newspapers were always several days old.¹ He stresses the irregularity of the newspapers noting, they were "too infrequent to help the suffering of the heartbroken population of the occupied zone."² Newspapers from unoccupied France that did reach the tri-city region were extremely expensive and the people passed them from hand to hand until the newspapers fell apart. The newspapers most frequently cited as being smuggled into the occupied cities were *Le Matin*, *L'Echo de Paris*, and *Petit Journal*.

Contraband newspapers reached the tri-city via a few different routes. Some people succeeded in smuggling in newspapers from Holland, often as wrapping for other items. There existed professional smugglers, before the war, who took advantage in the lower prices of alcohol and gasoline in Belgium, selling it as contraband in northern France for a profit. Once the war started, old and new smugglers undertook smuggling under the Germans, and information passed secretly between France and Belgium despite

¹ Leman, "Lille sous l'occupation allemande", 6.

² "...elle était trop irrégulière, trop intermittente pour suffire aux malheureuses populations des régions occupées." Leman, "A la mémoire de M. Joseph Wilot," 605.

the presence of sentries, and electrified and barbed wire barriers.³ *The New York Times* reported in 1917 that if people in Roubaix or Tourcoing wished to read a French newspaper they could sometimes buy one from German officers, who would sell the newspaper for the outrageous price of the equivalent of ten American dollars (in 1917 currency).⁴ In occupied Brussels, the trade in prohibited newspapers provided many people with a black market livelihood.⁵ It would not be surprising if German troops partook in similar transactions. In “*Invasion*,” Maxence van der Meersch wrote, “there were also occasions when an aeroplane would drop a bundle of French papers. A single copy would be picked up, at the danger of the finder’s life, sometimes on a rooftop, and for a fortnight there was sunshine in their hearts.”⁶ This precursor to concerted efforts of dropping newspapers specifically written for the occupied zone occurred very haphazardly, usually done as part of a larger aerial mission.

There are conflicting reports on how many issues of newspapers the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing received from unoccupied France. The *Journal des réfugiés du Nord* is one of the best sources for such information. In the July 22, 1916, issue, a person repatriated from the occupied zone noted that since the bombing, the Lillois have had no news from France. The rare newspapers from Paris that British planes dropped (namely *Le Matin* and *L’Echo de Paris*) remained in the hands of a small number of people, as it was extremely difficult and dangerous to pass them along to others.⁷ However, just five months later and seventeen miles outside of Lille, in Douai, it

³ McPhail, 116, 118.

⁴ *The New York Times Current History: The European War*, vol. 10, January-March 1917 (NY: The New York Times Company, 1917), 112.

⁵ Massart, “The Secret Press in Belgium,” 6.

⁶ van der Meersch, 286.

⁷ *Journal des réfugiés de Nord*, July 22, 1916.

was reported that people get to read French newspapers often enough to generate confidence in the final victory of the Allies.⁸ Another article suggested that it was not only newspapers from unoccupied France being read on the sly in occupied France; a person in the occupied zone stated that he read in *La Suisse* of American aid to Belgium.⁹ By April of the following year, the *Journal des réfugiés du Nord* reported that news from unoccupied France is rare in the occupied zone.¹⁰ Overall, the evidence suggests that very little information trickled across the barrier separating occupied France from the rest of the world. Eugène Martin-Mamy wrote that he felt he had a responsibility to begin publishing a newspaper in Lille immediately after the war ended despite all the obstacles he faced, because he knew the misery of the people who went four years without a French newspaper.¹¹

Sources from the time (such as the *Journal des réfugiés du Nord* and Auguste Leman's writing) suggest that the three newspapers from unoccupied France most frequently smuggled in were the dailies *Le Matin*, *Petit Journal*, and *L'Echo de Paris*. Providing an analysis of the news contained in these newspapers would afford light insight into the news available in the tri-city area, for we do not know which issues reached the people of occupied France. However, it is worthwhile to include a brief overview of each paper, to understand the slant and style of these newspapers that occasionally reached some people in the occupied cities.

⁸ Ibid., December 23, 1916.

⁹ Ibid., November 8, 1916.

¹⁰ Ibid., April 18, 1917.

¹¹ Eugène Martin-Mamy, *Quatre ans avec les barbares: Lille pendant l'occupation allemande* (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1919), 180.

Two Englishmen and an American started *Le Matin* in 1884, as an American-styled tabloid, including short, action-orientated news stories under large headlines.¹² The newspaper struggled until 1898, when Maurice Bunau-Varilla took over and reorganized it.¹³ The newspaper's circulation reached 600,000 by 1909. Bunau-Varilla oversaw *Le Matin* until 1944, when French authorities closed it down for collaboration with the Nazis.¹⁴ During the First World War, *Le Matin*, a right-of-center newspaper, tended to adhere to the official line received from the French military, but its journalists also had a propensity for hyperbole. For example, on September 20, 1914, the newspaper included an article on two captured German soldiers found to have the severed hands of a woman and a child in their pockets.¹⁵ The newspaper famously proclaimed that the Russians were five days away from Berlin early in the war when it was going poorly for the Allies.¹⁶ With few exceptions, history has not recorded which issues of *Le Matin* reached Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing. Did the November 1, 1914, issue, which reassured readers that the Allies pushed back violent German attacks (a fairly accurate description although the statements that the Germans suffered great losses hinted of exaggeration), reach anybody in the occupied zone?¹⁷ The most we can say with certainty is that infrequently a few issues reached the people of the occupied zone, and when they did, those fortunate enough to lay their eyes on the issue would have most likely read the official French military line, with perhaps a dose of exaggeration in favor of the French cause.

¹² Michael Stephen Smith, *The Emergence of Modern Business Enterprise in France, 1800-1930* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2006), 263.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Michael Nolan, "The Eagle Soars over the Nightingale: Press and Propaganda in France in the Opening Months of the Great War," *A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion, and Newspaper in the Great War*, Troy R.E. Paddock, ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 58.

¹⁶ Collins, "Cossacks Marching to Berlin," 29.

¹⁷ *Le Matin*, November 1, 1914.

Moise Millaud launched the smaller format *Le Petit Journal*.¹⁸ The content of the newspaper was mainly coverage of crime and violent events, but also included theater schedules, stock quotations, and serialized novels. By the 1880s, illustrations and huge headlines announced the sensational articles.¹⁹ Perhaps most unique for the time, *Le Petit Journal* was nonpolitical, which exempted it from the government stamp tax on political newspapers. Thus, this newspaper sold for approximately half the price of other low-price dailies.²⁰ When Millaud died in 1871, a syndicate including Hippolyte Marinoni and Emile de Girardina, took over the newspaper.²¹ By 1882, it boasted the largest circulation in Paris. Under the Third Republic the distinction between political and nonpolitical newspapers disappeared for taxing purposes, allowing the editor-in-chief, Ernest Prevet, to utilize the newspaper to espouse his aggressively nationalist views, that included being anti-Dreyfusard in the 1890s.²² This viewpoint lost the paper a portion of its readership in Paris, as its circulation dropped behind that of *Le Petit Parisien* and *Le Matin*. However, it remained the most popular Parisian daily outside of Paris on the eve of the First World War. Much like *Le Matin*, *Le Petit Journal* championed the official French military line, which coincided with its political right-wing leaning and reflexive nationalism.²³ Did the August 1, 1916, issue that relied upon military terms to describe the economic strength of France, stating that the country has utilized its economic arsenal prudently and had strong

¹⁸ Michael Stephen Smith claims the newspaper began in 1863, while Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar state that it launched in 1865. Smith, 262. Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2005), 89.

¹⁹ Thomas Cragin, *Murder in Parisian Streets: Manufacturing Crime and Justice in the Popular Press, 1830-1900* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 37.

²⁰ Smith, 262.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Nolan, 53.

reserves, reach the occupied zone?²⁴ Again, we are unsure, but it can be stated that the few issues of this newspaper that reached the occupied zone would have provided readers with very encouraging news from the French perspective.

Le Matin and the *Le Petit Journal* were right of center in the views that their editors and journalists espoused, but *L’Echo de Paris’* staff published opinions that were to the extreme right, leading Jean-Jacques Becker to deem it an organ of the militarist and Catholic right.²⁵ The newspaper contained an “inexhaustible flow” of articles on every imaginable topic related to the war, written by nationalist writers such as Albert de Mun and Maurice Barrès.²⁶ The French novelist Paul Bourget described de Mun during the early days of the war as the “pulse of the nation’s heart,” as de Mun preached daily to the people, through *L’Echo de Paris*, a profoundly Christian message, reviving the message of Joan of Arc, of courage and hope.²⁷ As the war started, Maurice Barrès was one of France’s most well-known and conservative novelists. Utilizing *L’Echo de Paris* as his medium, he glorified the purity of war and the spirit of patriotism.²⁸ Did the November 19, 1914 issue of *L’Echo de Paris* reach the occupied zone, with an article by Barrès, extolling the unique contribution French women were making to the war, as mothers and wives?²⁹ With so many ardently patriotic, and even nationalistic and jingoistic articles, many of which condemned the Germans as vile and corrupt, the laws of probability suggest that whatever issues of the newspaper reached the readers of Lille, Roubaix, and

²⁴ *Le Petit Journal*, August 1, 1916.

²⁵ Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, 39.

²⁶ Nolan, 61, 68.

²⁷ “le battement même du coeur du pays.” P.W. Browne, “A Modern Crusader,” *Catholic World* 114 (March 1922), 379.

²⁸ Collins, *World War I*, 331. Collins also notes that Barrès glorification of war and patriotism has led some historians to contend he presaged the postwar appeal of fascism – despite his hatred of Germany. 331.

²⁹ “Le Coeur des Femmes de France,” *L’Echo de Paris*, November 19, 1914.

Tourcoing, they surely raised the patriotic ire of the readers, and fuelled their intense dislike for the German authorities.

Dropped Newspapers

As mentioned before, sometimes newspapers from unoccupied France reached the occupied zone because a plane succeeded in dropping them.³⁰ It is impossible to gauge what literature reached people. Beyond the possibility of people not finding the literature, British airmen did not like dropping material and “were reportedly prone to burn[ing] leaflets in the hangars.”³¹ It is unclear whether the airmen distained the job because it was not deemed “fighting,” or if they were concerned because Germany threatened to hang any aviators captured with propaganda literature. After dropping newspapers and pamphlets into unoccupied France for the first year of the war, France and England decided to develop newspapers especially for those behind enemy lines.

The French government made some rather anemic attempts at influencing people through newspapers in the occupied zone. The French army was in charge of propaganda directed at French territories occupied by the Germans. The Section de la propagande aérienne dropped imitation German-language newspapers, meant to trick German soldiers into believing their own government was taking a defeatist attitude, to demoralize the occupiers, and a French newspaper meant to raise the morale of the French population.³² They titled the newspaper meant for the occupied zone *La Voix du Pays*. Between September 28, 1915, and October 29, 1918, Allied airplanes and balloons dropped

³⁰ Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 58.

³¹ Clayton D. Laurie, “The Chanting of Crusaders: Captain Herber Blankenhorn and AEF Combat Propaganda in World War I,” *The Journal of Military History* (July 1995): 472.

³² Laska, 109.

approximately eighty issues of *la Voix du Pays* on occupied France. The French also dropped this newspaper on Alsace and Lorraine.³³ The information bulletin usually contained four pages filled with war information and news from refugees originally from the occupied territories, now living in unoccupied France.³⁴ The March 29, 1916, issue of *Le Journal des réfugiés du Nord* described *La Voix du Pays*, noting it was a small newspaper of four pages that brought news of France, which was printed on light paper. The news in it was brief but true, and for that reason comforting. It offered news about the lives of refugees in Paris and elsewhere, as well as topics such as le Comité des réfugiés du Nord and the great sorrow felt at the loss of Eugène Jacquet.³⁵ The newspaper attempted to provide the people of occupied France not only news of the war in general, but news that would be of specific interest to them, that would not receive detailed coverage in *Le Matin* or *L’Echo de Paris*.

Starting in April 1917, the British Ministry of War created a newspaper, *Courrier de l’Air*, for distribution in occupied Belgium and France, and intermittently in Germany. Published until January 25, 1918, it was an eleven-inch by nine-inch single-sheet with print on both sides produced weekly. The average number of copies distributed was five thousand.³⁶ The newspaper’s stated objective was to support the morale of Britain’s friends behind German lines. At first airplanes dropped the newspaper until the Germans made it a priority to shoot down these planes. Then the British used air balloons to drop the newspapers. The British dispatched these balloons to France twice a week, but only a portion of would reach occupied France. If the wind suggested the balloons would land

³³ Bruntz, 17.

³⁴ Claude Bellanger, Godechot, Guirals and Terrou, 445.

³⁵ *Journal des réfugiés du Nord*, March 29, 1916. See chapter two, pages 63-64 of this dissertation for a brief overview of Eugène Jacquet’s work.

³⁶ C.J.C. Street, “Propaganda Behind the Lines,” *The Cornhill Magazine* 47 (November 1919):489.

in the battle zone, the British attached propaganda leaflets whose intended audience was Germans soldiers instead.

In at least one issue, the newspaper carried a notice to readers quite different than that in the clandestine press. Unlike the clandestine press, which beseeched readers to be very circumspect in sharing news from the paper, the dropped-in paper asked readers to not throw out or destroy the newspaper, but to pass it to their neighbors, as they too were anxious to know what is happening in the world.³⁷ This suggests that perhaps the British military leaders were not as cognizant of the danger facing people in the occupied zone if the Germans caught them with the newspaper. However, the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing knew to treat the airplane dropped newspapers just like those of the clandestine press.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I read sixteen issues of the newsheet. However, the source was not from a collection from the occupied zone, so it is uncertain if anybody in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing received these articles. Hence, there can be no benefit in discussing specific articles, but it is worthwhile to note the type of news it carried. Much like all the other newspapers, it provided battle coverage, this time infused with British propaganda. One news story that was more likely than most to reach the people of the occupied zone via this newspaper was the British naval attack on the German-held Belgian ports of Zeebrugge and Ostende. At least five articles described the destruction of these important ports and the subsequent attempts to rebuild them by the Germans.³⁸ In truth, the daring British operation was a failure, not achieving its objective of blocking the port by sinking three old cruisers loaded with cement, and

³⁷ *Le Courrier de l'Air*, April 11, 1918.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, May 2, 1918, May 16, 1918, May 23, 1918, July 18, 1918, and August 22, 1918.

resulting in five hundred casualties.³⁹ Even though the Germans quickly dug a new channel at Zeebrugge and subsequent raids on Ostende failed, the attempt boosted British morale.⁴⁰ Overall, all the news published in this newspaper was extremely positive for the Allies and hinted the war was going extremely badly for Germany. As most of the issues examined for this dissertation were from the last months of the war, it was of course easier for the British to find positive, frequently accurate information as the Allies were on the cusp of winning the war.

Planes intermittently dropped another newspaper, *Le Cri des Flandres*, over the occupied cities of France.⁴¹ The man publishing the newspaper was Abbé Lemire, the mayor of Hazebrouck, a town northwest of Lille that was the key British rail center north of the Somme. A former professor of theology in a seminary, Rome excommunicated Abbé Lemire, supposedly for not asking their permission to sit as a Deputy in the Chamber of Deputies, but in reality because of the liberality of his opinions.⁴² Henry Russell Wakefield described Lemire as a leader in a town right at the front. Lemire took it upon himself to produce a newspaper to help sustain morale for those closest to the fighting. The German authorities created similar newspapers for German troops, two of which, *Liller Kriegszeitung* and *La Gazette de Colgone*, were readily available in the occupied cities of France.

³⁹ Burg and Purcell, 205.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 208.

⁴¹ Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre: Humanitaire et culture de guerre* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1998), 35.

⁴² Henry Russel Wakefield, *A Fortnight at the Front* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1915), 25.

More German Newspapers – 1. *Liller Kriegszeitung*

The *Liller Kriegszeitung* was a newspaper of the Sixth German Army, meant for the occupation forces, and published in Lille, its name translating to “Lille War News.” Hauptmann D.L. Hoecker and Rittmeister Freiherr Von Ompteda of the Lille high command published the four-page *Liller Kriegszeitung* from December 8, 1914, until September 27, 1918, three times a week. Captain Paul Oskar Höcker, a well-known writer from Brandenburg, edited the newspaper, overseeing writers from the army. He was a best-selling author prior to the war, and he quickly wrote *An der Spitze meiner Kompagnie (At the Head of my Company)* in 1914 from the front.⁴³ Soon after its publication in English, *The New York Times* described his book as one of the most graphic and convincing pieces of writing to come out of the war.⁴⁴ The Germans produced the newspaper using the office space and equipment of the closed-down *L’Echo du Nord* (a large regional daily before the war).

The *Liller Kriegzeitung* was a well-produced, high quality newspaper, in terms of both presentation and content. It contained articles not only providing military and political news and analysis, but also articles on history and geography, science and medicine, literature and musical criticism, poems, and illustrations.⁴⁵ From 1915 through 1917 the newspaper included a two-page illustrated supplement, the *Kriegslugblätter*, produced by Karl Arnold. The artistic quality of the photographs and drawings were of a high caliber, but always carried a pro-German propaganda message. Within Germany, the newspaper enjoyed a widespread reputation for excellence and good taste; in Germany and among the German armed forces in France it was a highly regarded newspaper.

⁴³ Natter, 55.

⁴⁴ “Novelist-Soldier’s Narrow Escapes,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 1915.

⁴⁵ Laska, 125.

By the end of 1916, the Germans produced 110,000 copies per issue, with copies given free to members of the Sixth Army. To cover the cost of these free-publications, the Germans created a quasi-publishing company that produced postcards, propaganda brochures, and a few books. For example, *La Guerre 1914-1918* was a seventy-eight page book explaining how the Germans were not responsible for the war, and France's true enemies were Britain and Russia.⁴⁶

The Germans considered Lille a prized capture, so many of the articles and illustrations in the *Liller Kriegszeitung* pertained to situations and events taking place in the city. The *Journal des réfugiés du Nord* published an article noting that several German newspapers, including the *Liller Kriegszeitung*, were producing a lot of information and articles on Lille, as the city had become a meeting point for German reporters. From a French point of view, the coverage was not impressive, as it did not contain detailed information about the state of the city, but rather tirades heavy on psychological analysis.⁴⁷ While glorifying the beauty of grandeur of Lille along with German pride at taking the French city, the tone of the newspaper was certainly anti-French. However, the writers and publishers of the paper directed most of their hostility towards the upper, ruling classes of Lille, while they reported quite fairly on the population in general. The newspaper editors even went so far as to publish an article showing German admiration for the invaded population.⁴⁸ Nor did the paper advocate nonfraternization with the local population. As Richard Cobb notes, the content of the newspaper, including suggestions of guided tours of Lille's museums and art galleries, seemed to encourage German soldiers to take part in city life and permitted contact with

⁴⁶ Laska, 125. Natter claims that by November 1916 the newspaper's circulation reached 115,000.

⁴⁷ *Journal des réfugiés du Nord*, May 30, 1916.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, September 11, 1918.

the civilian population.⁴⁹ However, the *Liller Kriegszeitung*, like all other German military newspapers, lost much of its individuality in 1917 as the Army High Command believed they were a useful, influential tool, that needed to be better utilized and directed. The German Army High Command homogenized and centralized the information included in all its newspapers and restructured the newspaper. Wolfgang Natter describes the change, noting "...whatever particularity has been possible for expressing *Frontgeist* within this medium prior to Patriotic Instruction became more circumscribed, even as its consolidation of a purported authentic voice from the trenches served as further material to sustain élan at home."⁵⁰

Realistically, very few men and women of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing read this newspaper. The Germans did not intend the newspaper for the occupied population and hence did not make it available to them. In an environment where the occupied people learned to covertly gain news, whether through smuggled newspapers or passing around issues of the clandestine press, it would not have been difficult for them to stealthily picked up copies of the *Liller Kriegszeitung* from cafés and around town. Furthermore, the Germans did not actively use threats to discourage the people from reading the paper. However, two factors kept the people of the occupied cities from reading this newspaper. Firstly, the newspaper was in German, and very few people in the tri-city area could read German, especially when written in "Bavarian slang," like this newspaper. Richard Cobb commented that he needed assistance in translating this newspaper while researching his book.⁵¹ Secondly, it most likely did not seem

⁴⁹ Cobb, *French and Germans*, 22-3.

⁵⁰ Natter, 56. *Frontgeist* roughly translates to "spirit of the trenches," however Natter utilizes the words to cover all soldiers' active duty experiences, including those occupying occupied territories.

⁵¹ Cobb, *French and Germans*, xxii.

worthwhile to the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing to secretly work to attain this newspaper, when news from the German perspective was so readily available in *La Gazette des Ardennes*.

More German Newspapers – 2. *La Gazette de Cologne*

Known as the *Kölnische Zeitung* in German, this German-language newspaper was a little-read source of information for the French in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing for many of the same reasons as the *Liller Kriegszeitung*; it was written in German and was another source of German propaganda. Nevertheless, Annette Becker notes that when it was available in the cities, people did look to it for battle information.⁵² It was a semi-official newspaper, which even before the war frequently inserted articles by the Foreign Office.⁵³ Needless to say, the newspaper's editors were strong proponents of the German war aims. Prior to the German army mobilizing, the newspaper's St. Petersburg correspondent, who also happened to be a member of the German embassy staff, wrote that a preventative war was necessary against Russia.⁵⁴ The paper's editors placed responsibility for the war not on the country that declared war, Germany, but on the countries that made war necessary, England and Russia. The editors noted that Germany just was not so obtuse as to wait for the enemy to finish preparing for war.⁵⁵

However, one cannot dismiss this newspaper completely as a source of news for the French in the occupied cities. Typed copies of translated articles from *La Gazette de*

⁵² Annette Becker, *Journaux de combattants et civils de la France du Nord dans la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998), 15.

⁵³ Mark Hewitson, *Germany and the Causes of the First World War* (New York: Berg, 2004), 71, 78.

⁵⁴ Auguste Gauvain, *L'Europe au jour le jour*, Volume 7: *La Guerre européenne (juin 1914- février 1915)* (Paris, Édition Bassard, 1920), 245.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 382-3.

Cologne, published from 1915 through the summer of 1916, seem to have been printed utilizing machines similar to those of the clandestine press and on similar inexpensive paper. It appears some of the occupied French shared these articles in a manner comparable to that of the clandestine press.⁵⁶ One article, entitled “The Utilization of the Occupied Regions of France,” boasted about the amount of raw materials and manufactured goods the German military was expropriating from the Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing.⁵⁷ It is plausible that the aim of the unknown translator and distributor of this article was to increase the ire that the French in the occupied zone felt towards the German occupiers and validate what many Frenchmen saw occurring before their own eyes.

Books Authorized by the Germans

Periodically *La Gazette des Ardennes* included an advertisement for books and pamphlets available for order from the *Librairie de la Gazette des Ardennes*. The people of the occupied cities treasured books, especially as cold winters forced many of them to sacrifice their collections to keep themselves warm, burning the pages in fires or ripping them out to insulate their clothes. However, even for those who still had the money to buy books, those advertised in *La Gazette des Ardennes* most likely would not have interested them. Not surprisingly, the literature advocated everything German while lambasting the Allies and in particular the British. A quick examination of four of the books and pamphlets sold in the occupied zone provide a glimpse into the type of

⁵⁶ Somebody in the tri-city region transcribed speeches by politicians and a few articles originally from the *Bulletin des Armées de la République* in a similar manner.

⁵⁷ “L’Utilisation des Regions occupées de la France,” *La Gazette de Cologne*, February 1, 1915.

information French people in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing could purchase, if they had the means and desire.

One pamphlet announced for sale in the *Gazette des Ardennes* was Bruce Glasirr's (sic) *La Militarisme Anglais*. This was a translation of Glasier's thirty-page war pamphlet. In it, he denounced the "materialists" who held positions of power and influence in Victorian England and how they led to the current British state. Bruce Glasier was an ardent socialist and chairman of the Independent Labor Party in Scotland. He supported the British anti-war organization, the No-Conscription Fellowship, which encouraged men to refuse war service.⁵⁸ Utilizing British and French writings against the Allied war effort was a key German propaganda technique, employed more frequently by the placement of adulterated articles by French and English authors in German newspapers. Hence, the misspelling of Glasier's last name was most likely a typographical error rather than an attempt to misrepresent his identity.

The *Gazette des Ardennes* also advertised the book, *Les Peuplades de Couleur*, by D'Hansvorst. It is difficult to determine much information about the author of this book. It is possible that Hans Vorst, the Moscow correspondent of the *Berliner Tageblatt* during the First World War, wrote this book, although his specialty was Russia rather than the use of men from Africa in fighting in Europe. The point of the book is not difficult to garner however. France was the only country to recruit men from its African colonies to fight in Europe, doing so to compensate for its demographic weakness against the Germans.⁵⁹ During the course of the four years, France had approximately 171,000 West

⁵⁸ Priscilla Mary Roberts and Spencer Tucker, eds. *World War I: A Student Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 4:1339.

⁵⁹ Strachan, *World War I: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 95-96.

African troops serving in Europe, and their casualties numbered over 80,000 men.⁶⁰

Many in Europe feared that this practice threatened European racial superiority, a fear the Germans played up in occupied France both in the newspapers they published and in this book. After the war, Germany's defeat by a country that allowed Africans to fight and kill white men helped fuel the racism of the inter-war years.⁶¹

Karl Helfferich's *Le Prospérité nationale de l'Allemagne de 1888 à 1918* was also available for sale in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing. Dr. Karl Helfferich was the German Secretary of the Treasury and later Imperial Vice Chancellor. Prior to the war he was Director of the Deutsche Bank. This was an updated and translated version of his original work, *Deutschlands Volkswahlstand 1888-1913*.⁶² The book provides a detailed analysis of Germany's economy, examining issues such as population growth, food supply, and the use of science in business, the training of labor, the country's consumption, aggregate income, and national wealth. It depicts Germany's economy as solid and growing, thanks to a well-trained work force and the utilization of the latest science and business techniques.

La Gazette des Ardennes also advertised Sevn Hedin's *Vers l'Est avec l'Armée allemande sur le Front Oriental* for sale.⁶³ This 150-page book was a translated and abridged version of Hedin's 1917 work, *Kriget mot Ryssland*. Hedin was a Swedish

⁶⁰ Ibid., 96.

⁶¹ Stefan Goodwin, *Africa in Europe: Interdependencies, Relocations, and Globalization* (Plymouth, U.K.: Lexington Books, 2009), 205. Goodwin notes that this racism was inflamed by the use of African soldiers during the supervisory occupation of the Rhineland, 205. Approximately 500,000 French colonial subjects, referred to as *troupes indigènes*, fought for France, including men from North Africa, West Africa, Indochina, and Madagascar. Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 2. See also Jean-Yves Le Naour, *La honte noire: l'Allemagne et les troupes coloniales françaises, 1914-1945* (Paris: Hachette, 2003).

⁶² The English version of the work is titled *Germany's Economic Progress and National Wealth 1888-1913* (New York: Germanistic Society of America, 1914).

⁶³ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, June 15, 1918.

explorer and scientist and one of the few foreign correspondents who was with the German army since almost the beginning of the war. The Germans' choice of Hedin was not surprising. He had already established a name for himself as a brave explorer and was a passionate Germanophile. In 1909, he proposed a Scandinavian Union that would have close ties to Germany to counter-balance the Anglo-Russian reconciliation.⁶⁴ In 1915, Hedin published *With the German Armies in the West*, a translated version coming out the same year as the Swedish original. For the purpose of this dissertation, I came across no evidence that the Germans made this book available in occupied France. It would not be surprising if the Germans withheld this book, for it provided an inaccurate assessment of life in Lille. Hedin suggests that Lille sustained little damage at the hands of the Germans, and the areas bombed, namely the Porte Douai area, had to be because of French resistance. Furthermore, this ardent Germanophile claimed life had returned to normal in Lille, noting, "In the central parts of the town the traffic is almost animated and there are plenty of people about. Young women of not even doubtful virtue and dressed in almost the latest fashion flit about like butterflies on pavements... Many shops and hotels are open and seem to be carrying on as if nothing happened."⁶⁵ Other books and pamphlets fitting the same pattern as the above-mentioned books were available to readers in the occupied zone. However, they added little to the knowledge of the people, as their content was so distasteful to the occupied French that they either disregarded what they read, or more frequently, simply chose not to read those books.

⁶⁴ T. Lothrop Stoddard, "The Scandinavian Revival and the War," *The Atlantic Monthly* 115 (February 1915): 416.

⁶⁵ Sven Hedin, *With the German Armies in the West*, trans. H.G. De Walterstroff (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1915), 310-1.

One should not exaggerate the influence of the sources discussed in this chapter upon the people of the occupied zone. Either few Frenchmen had access to these newspapers, books, and pamphlets, or the messages these sources contained were so disagreeable few people would heed them. However, the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing dealt with an overwhelming feeling that they lacked news and information about the war raging in such close proximity to them. Under these circumstances, some people were bound to read any source that could potential provided them with the information they so craved. In such a situation, these news sources need to be included in a study of the media available to the occupied people.

Conclusion

In his study of the occupation of Belgium, Larry Zuckerman raises an interesting question: why did Germany's enemies make so little of the occupation, even when the Germans provided them with fresh insults every week?¹ Zuckerman suggests that perhaps the rest of the world was not outraged by German behavior in areas they occupied because nobody outside the occupied zones could appreciate what was happening, as they lacked a frame of reference. Once the world truly understood the possible effects of German military extremism with the Second World War, the horrors of that war overshadowed the indignities of the First World War. During the last fifteen years, several historians have taken on the task of examining what happened in northern France during the First World War and providing a frame of reference for life in the occupied zones. This dissertation aimed to add to this discussion, through an examination of what news was available. As Asa Briggs and Peter Burke note in the introduction of their work, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, historians need to take serious account of the role of communication in history.² Historians need to treat media not only as a source recording history, but also as an element that helps shape events and is worthy of analysis.

Piqued at losing control of the three great cities of northern France, the Germans were radical in defiling, destroying, and stealing from the cities as they withdrew in 1918. They systematically burglarized the French cities, vandalizing, usually beyond repair, any industrial or agricultural item they could not take with them. If Frenchmen had believed

¹ Zuckerman, 136.

² Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 2.

what the German-controlled press reported for four years of conflict about how the Germans conducted war and which side was winning the war, the Germans' withdrawal and their actions in leaving would have shocked those Frenchmen. However, nobody was shocked. Despite four years of reading how the Germans were fighting and winning the war in an honorable manner, in the face of dastardly British acts, the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing knew when the Germans began facing difficulties, and the large-scale pettiness the Germans were capable of in the face of that loss. This disconnect between the world presented in the pages of the German-controlled newspaper and reality became obvious during the final weeks of the war. It was apparent that the Germans were losing the war, as the once confident German occupiers became mere shadows of their former selves. However, the German-controlled newspapers continued to report as if the war was going reasonably well for the Germans, especially in the papers produced in France. The newspapers in the occupied zone usually only referenced the changing situation and the potential of a German loss in their last issue, immediately before the German evacuation.

During the First World War in non-occupied zones, governments suppressed all news that could distress their people and shift domestic public opinion away from supporting the war. The reverse was true in the occupied zone – editors and censors attempted to withhold any news that could provide hope. The aim was to create feelings of disillusionment and surrender, creating an occupied populace that was easy to control and whose desires for peace outweighed any patriotic concerns over who won the war and what the repercussions would be. If such propaganda was hugely successful, perhaps the occupied people would even be willing to continue a relationship with the occupiers once

the war was over. Having to ingest news with this *raison d'être*, with only a short lived clandestine press and intermittently available smuggled newspapers as an alternative, was one of the greatest hardships of occupation that the people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing endured.

The Germans considered their ability to control news in the occupied zone as vital to their war aims. Hence, distribution of clandestine papers was one of the most serious infractions against occupation rules. Receiving unadulterated news was also a passion for many in the occupied zone, making the producers of the secret press some of the greatest heroes in northern France. For those fortunate enough to have access to these underground newspapers, the papers could act as a potential counter to the interpretations of news in the German-controlled press. For example, both sources reported upon the German zeppelin attacks on Paris and London. The German papers painted an image of a Paris and London crippled with fear. The clandestine press cited the same events as evidence of the German's panicking. This fresh point of view was a great gift to the occupied. However, these newspapers were available for only eighteen short months of the four long years of occupation, and people had to read the German-controlled press to fulfill their human desire for information.

The Germans wanted to foster a certain amount of dependence among the people of the Nord by being their only link to the outside world.³ Through different German-controlled or censored newspapers, the Germans provided a substantial amount of news reflecting their viewpoint. The two local newspapers, the *Gazette des Ardennes*, *Le Bruxellois*, and briefly, two other Belgian papers, combined to provide a significant amount of news. While some of the German-controlled newspapers only provided short

³ Buffton, 57.

blurbs about crucial events, readers could piece together information from the different sources, since the individual newspapers told different parts of the same story. Early during the war, readers could find out that female refugees repatriated from their northern cities to Paris were helping the war effort by working a few hours a week making clothes for the wounded and children.⁴ From *La Gazette des Ardennes*, readers could learn that people repatriated from the north living in Paris faced some hostilities, as locals resented the competition for employment.⁵ Finally, from *La Belgique* readers would find out that authorities created a floating village made of barges on the Seine for those refugees unable to find a place to live.⁶ Furthermore, the newspapers may have reinforced their shared message. Before the Germans occupied the area, people may have read different newspapers that provided slightly different analyses of the same events. Now several newspapers, while varying in what information they provided, all carried the same message that France was weakening, Britain was evil, and Germany was the future of Europe. The occupied people's reliance upon the Germans for news has historically created the perception that those in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing received little information about the war beyond what they could garner with their own senses. Perhaps the true problem of news was not the sheer lack of it, although it was an element as compared to pre-war levels, but the lack of certainty that it could be trusted, the amount of speculation needed to be digested with it, the delay with which it was received, and the uncertainty that any follow-up might be forthcoming.

The industrial urban areas of northern France knew both the hardships and benefits of city life. German occupation exacerbated the problems of city life, including

⁴ *Le Bien Public*, Nov. 30, 1915

⁵ *La Gazette des Ardennes*, May 31, 1915.

⁶ *La Belgique*, Dec. 24, 1915.

difficulties finding employment that allowed for a decent standard of living. The occupation also took away some of the privileges of urban living, such as easy access to news prepared by French journalists and editors. Surprisingly, considering the harsh life and limitations on advancement the large working class endured, most adults in these cities were literate and considering being informed a way of life. As the German military gravitated towards military extremism, demanding complete obedience from enemy populations, they took away information supplied from outside sources. To help attain complete obedience, the Germans isolated the occupied French not only physically from their countrymen, but also mentally, by acting as the most powerful conduit of information.

By taking control of the information people received, the German occupiers in northern France created their own version of history and current events. To use a modern term, the “spin” placed on events perpetrated the German line, and often distorted the truth to the point of deception. However distorted, the news in German-controlled newspapers did give the readers of occupied France great insight into what events were occurring, even when misleading them in the significance of those events or who they were benefiting. Since readers did not trust German-controlled media, they knew to question the “spin,” hence leaving readers with a knowledge of what events were important to the war, but uncertainty about who was winning. They did not know if the Germans were leaving vital facts out or exaggerating the importance of other elements of the story. For example, people in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing knew about the Battles of the Somme and Ypres as fact; they speculated about who was winning these battles.

Analyzing the news became a passionate hobby for many in the occupied zone, who were just trying to figure out some semblance of the truth.

In his portrayal of life in occupied Lille, one of Maxence van der Meersch's characters commented that since October 1914 news from France had entirely ceased. He used language poignantly foreshadowing later history, when he said the Germans lowered a steel curtain between the occupied districts and the rest of the world. The narrator noted that, "it was quite obvious that the continued ignorance was sapping the morale and generally unsettling the civilian population; and it was undoubtedly the intention of the enemy to do so."⁷ Indeed, with the liberalization of press laws during the Third Republic, the average urban Frenchman had grown to expect an abundance of relatively unadulterated information from a variety of sources. Despite the hardship caused by the lack of trusted news, however, it did not disappear as entirely as imagined. Rather, the pain came from the source of news. Rumors and false information occurred in the occupied cities, as the newspaper's versions always came with doubt. When it came to information, in many ways the occupied zone was comparable to the trenches. Both were environments that produced their share of *fausses nouvelles*. Like the occupied populations men in the trenches had a lack of regular news from the outside, endured the closeness of the enemy, and relied upon mouth to mouth communication that made inaccuracies quite common.⁸

Responsibility to evaluate the information presented falls upon the media consumer every time he or she reads a newspaper, a greatly amplified situation in occupied France. As John Merrill and Jack Odell waxed poetic on the topic, "The

⁷ van der Meersch, 83.

⁸ Marc Bloch, *Memoirs of War, 1914-1915*, translated by Carole Fink (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 44.

problem faced by journalist's audiences is to... try to separate the wheat of honest journalism from the chaff of propaganda."⁹ Propaganda propagators, in general, can only take advantage of trusting people. Readers can protect themselves by "wrapping themselves in a protective cloak of skepticism, or even cynicism."¹⁰ The people of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, while losing safety and comfort, did have, along with their dignity, a heavy cloak of cynicism about anything touched by the German occupiers. In general, newspapers may have historically encouraged skepticism, as readers noted the discrepancies between reports of the same events in different newspapers, or even within the same newspaper, and the regularity with which later issues contradict statements made earlier.¹¹ The people of these cities were media savvy enough to naturally question the information received and questions the writers' motives.

Madame Reboux escaped occupation after twenty-six months but not before her daughter died from a lack of food. She said, "it is easy to forbid a conquered people; it is hard to compel them."¹² While not the aim of this dissertation, it is natural to want to comment on whether German propaganda disseminated through newspapers in the occupied zone was successful. The easy answer is no, as the people of occupied France never began to sympathize with the German point of view. Even the German military leaders did not feel their propaganda efforts during the First World War were successful; they lamented their lack of propaganda sophistication as compared to that of the British, and believed it was a contributing factor to them losing the war. The Nazis took propaganda to a new level under Josef Goebbels, but he and Hitler looked to British and

⁹ John Merrill and Jack Odell, *Philosophy and Journalism* (New York: Longman, 1983), 129.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-1.

¹¹ Briggs and Burke, 72.

¹² Kauffmann, 19.

Russian propaganda from the First World War for inspiration, not their own country's efforts. However, it is easy to dismiss German propaganda efforts in hindsight because they lost the war. The people of northern France were a strong, resilient people able to fend off assimilating German propaganda, while utilizing their newspapers to gather what information they could. Could these people have remained resilient if the war had lasted another year or two or would or would they have simply wanted peace at any cost and become more susceptible to the German line?

It is also interesting to think about how the occupation and its news reception affected historical thought. One of the most distinctive features of French historical scholarship is its contribution to the study of *mentalité*, or the mental furniture of populations in the past. *Mentalité* in this discourse means visceral commitments rather than ideologies, unspoken assumptions rather than political or social programmes.¹³ In her work studying media-related memories, Ingrid Volkmer determined that the news people receive is a part of their historical perception, or what people remember of history, which is a key component of culture memory.¹⁴ People remember time not as a sequence of events but as a discursive surface, readable only through layers of subsequent meanings and context, such as how media sources reporting the events at the time affected memory. To understand the relationship between events and how people remember those events and the role media plays between the two is comparable to “archeology in which the goal is not simply to uncover something that has been buried,

¹³ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War, 1914-1918: National Sentiment and Trench Journalism in France during the First World War*, trans. Helen McPhail intro by J.M. Winter (Providence, R.I.: Berg, 1992), ix.

¹⁴ Ingrid Volkmer, *News in Public Memory: An International Study of Media Memories across Generations* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 13-14.

but to discover how and why additional layers have been built on top of it.”¹⁵ Studying the content of these newspapers reveals a great deal about different topics. Beyond demonstrating that the occupied zone did receive more news than previously believed, they show how Germans wanted people to see the war. They also provide glimpses (if one can weed out the propaganda) of what life was like in the occupied zone. They also show the information these people received that became a part of the collective consciousness and hence an element in how they understood the war. The content of these newspapers is a small but important tool in providing a cultural reconstruction of the cities’ shared mentality during the war.

While this dissertation revealed that the people of occupied France had access to more news than believed, it does not diminish what they lost in terms of media access during the occupation. More than precise information about specific events, the great gift a system of news imparts is the confidence that we will be informed about any especially important or interesting events in an accurate manner.¹⁶ When such information comes from a trusted source, it provides a type of security people in northern France expected by the First World War and that they lost during occupation. The source of their news and their lack of trust in that source to provide an accurate description is why the people of occupied France remember receiving very little news during the war.

¹⁵ Volkmer, 14.

¹⁶ As cited in, Mitchell, 18.

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