

German and germans class



German and the Germans. Woodrow Wilson was re-elected in 1916 on a clear promise that he would not take the United States into the terrible war that had been raging in Europe since 1914. With the benefit of hindsight, critics have both criticized and praised his eventual decision to backtrack on that promise, and take America into that conflict in 1917 after all. One major reason which is often cited as a precursor to that fateful commitment, was the sinking of the passenger ship Lusitania on May 7th May 1917 with the loss of more than a thousand passengers and crew. Widely reported in the British press as “The Hun’s Most Ghastly Crime” (Preston, 2002, p. 308) this attack on a civilian ship severely tested Wilson’s resolve but America remained steadfastly opposed to joining the war until some 22 months later. The sinking of the Lusitania, and the ensuing diplomatic row about U-boat attacks on civilian and supply ships was, not, therefore sufficient reason to justify American entry into the war.

One of the main reasons why America entered the war was to protect its own financial interests: “By September 1916 Britain was purchasing American goods at a rate of over \$210 million per month, and France at \$38 million per month. (Burk, 1985, p. 14). While Germany also had lucrative trade deals with the United States, it was nothing like at this level, and so America had to think about the possible impact on its own position if the British and their allies should finally lose the war. There would be no possibility in the short term for these colossal debts to be paid back, and this would be bound to have a detrimental effect on the American economy for decades to come. It made financial sense, and indeed it was regarded as a matter of urgent expediency, for America to make sure that the British were on the winning side in this brutal war, and so there were very sound financial reasons why

America had to step in and make sure that this would be the final outcome of the war.

A further factor must also be considered, and that is the so-called “Zimmerman note” or “Zimmermann telegram” which was a piece of diplomatic correspondence sent by German diplomat Zimmermann to the Mexican ambassador, offering territorial inducements for Mexico to join the war on the German side. The proposal was, that Mexico would distract America with a war on its doorstep, while Germans, assured of victory, would recompense Mexico for its efforts with lands taken from the southern states of America. The telegram was secretly decoded by the British and secretly passed to the Americans, leaving America with no choice but to step in and stop this harmful nonsense. If America had let this go, then the possibility of hostilities on its own border, along with major financial problems through defaulting British and French creditors would have meant a disaster scenario for America.

In short, therefore, the entry into the war was brought about by the self-interest of America, rather than any single event or pressure from other countries. If America had not entered the war at this point, it is likely that it would have dragged on for many more years, with yet more loss of life and devastation in Europe and an even deeper Great Depression in the aftermath of the war in the United States. Entry to the war was therefore a necessary betrayal of the electorate by Woodrow Wilson, because the alternative would have been much, much worse.

References

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