

The Creel Committee's Influence on the Image of the Great War

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In early April 1917 President Wilson delivered his war message to Congress. He stated, “The world must be made safe for democracy.”<sup>1</sup> Wilson believed the war must not only be won on the battlefields, but on the homefront as well. Eight days after the United States declaration of war against Germany, the Committee on Public Information was formed under Executive Order No. 2594.<sup>2</sup> George Creel was to head the CPI, along with the assistance of the Secretaries of the State, War, and Navy. Creel had an extensive background in journalism as an editor and writer. He also was a long-time supporter of Wilson and in previous years had contributed to Wilson’s presidential campaigns, with publications like *Wilson and the Issues*, and “The Next Four Years: An Interview with the President”.

The Creel Committee was an unprecedented organization in America. It would constantly be attacked by the press and Congress. Although the CPI and Creel denied accusations of being a censorship board and a propaganda agency, in all actuality the committee was. “Many and brilliant were the famous Americans working under him [Creel], but the mighty propaganda machine of the CPI was his creation. He was the director of strategy in the ‘fight for the mind of mankind’.”<sup>3</sup> Still, the CPI would have an enormous impact on the image of the war given the committee’s short existence.

President Wilson was considering an agency like the Committee on Public Information long before World War I. He felt the press would invent stories if they did not like the facts they received from the government. “...Since I [Wilson] came here I have wondered how it ever happened that the public got the right impression regarding

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas G. Paterson, J. Garry Clifford, and Kenneth J. Hagan, *American Foreign Relations* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 82.

<sup>2</sup> Cedric Larson and James R. Mock, “The Lost Files of the Creel Committee of 1917-19,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1939): 8.

<sup>3</sup> Cedric Larson and James R. Mock, *Words that Won the War* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1939), 74.

public affairs, particularly foreign affairs.”<sup>4</sup> A week after war was declared on Germany, Wilson received a letter from Robert Lansing (Secretary of State), Newton D. Baker (Secretary of War), and Josephus Daniels (Secretary of Navy) asking the President to create a Committee on Public Information.<sup>5</sup> In response to the letter, Wilson appointed George Creel chairman of the CPI.

Creel believed the CPI presented the public with the truth. He rarely used the term propaganda, and when he did it was not meant in a negative way. Rather, “information” had to be spread to the public. Throughout his involvement with the CPI, Creel constantly stated his opposition to harsh censorship.

...When we entered the war on April 6, 1917, and the papers carried the news that some rigid form of censorship would be adopted, I wrote to the President in which I explained to him that the need was for expression not repression, and urged a campaign that would carry our war aims and peace terms not only to the United States, but to every neutral country, and also in England, France, and Italy. As for censorship, I insisted that all proper needs could be met by some voluntary methods.<sup>6</sup>

Both “expression” and “repression” of information were used to promote the war. For example, one might publicize an idea, while restraining an undesirable one at the same time. Information regarding national security would be repressed; meanwhile a division of the CPI would promote other material that had no connection with security. “By either method their [NSL and NBHS] actions required that they sit in judgment on the acceptability of specific information for the American public.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Henry A. Turner, “Woodrow Wilson and Public Opinions,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (Winter, 1957-1958): 515.

<sup>5</sup> Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, 50-51.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> George T. Blakey, *Historians on the Homefront; American Propagandists for the Great War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 84.

Propaganda was not a word that the CPI wanted to be associated with. “Our effort was educational and informative throughout, for we had such confidence in our case as to feel that no other argument was needed than the simple, straightforward presentation of facts.”<sup>8</sup> Americans came to believe propaganda as a negative term and associated the word with Germans. During the war, “‘German propagandist’ was a widely used epithet, one that also signified more than just words, referring also to propaganda of the deed, manifested in strikes, occasional violence, and spy activity.”<sup>9</sup> As a result, the CPI and Creel didn’t want the term connected with the committee. “In public statements, especially for consumption in neutral countries, it was frequently necessary to deny the intention of propagandizing – sometimes even to deny all connection with the CPI.”<sup>10</sup> Instead, the committee carried out the production of “publicity and information”.<sup>11</sup>

“All national war propaganda endeavors to mobilize home, allied, and neutral opinion in support of the country’s cause and conversely to demoralize the enemy.”<sup>12</sup> Creel pointed out that the Committee had three main objectives: to show the allies the U.S. was coming with quick aid, to have neutral nations join our side, and to convince the Central Powers of America’s strength.<sup>13</sup> These objectives follow the exact blueprint of war propaganda according to Dr. Lasswell. The intentions of war propaganda are to increase hatred of enemies, keep camaraderie with allies and neutrals, and finally to

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<sup>8</sup> George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1920), 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 20.

<sup>10</sup> Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, 236.

<sup>11</sup> Gary, *The Nervous Liberals*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Ralph Haswell Lutz, “Bibliographical Article: Studies of World War Propaganda,” *The Journal of Modern History* 5, no. 4. (Dec., 1933): 497.

<sup>13</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 9.

“demoralize the enemy”.<sup>14</sup> The CPI succeeded in all of these areas by many different and creative methods. It is also important to point out that “Scarcely an idea may be found in all the work of the CPI that was not held by many Americans before war was declared. The Committee was representative of the articulate majority in American opinion.”<sup>15</sup> The real problem that the CPI had to face was the issue of censorship.

Congress and the press had their doubts about the Committee. Both believed that the CPI was a censorship bureau. When Creel released “What the Government asks of the Press”, many newspapers did not listen to him.<sup>16</sup> Those who did follow the CPI’S suggestions wanted the other papers to be reprimanded for failing to do so. Creel pointed out that his Committee had no authority to “punish” the newspapers. He also stated that the Committee on Public Information’s policy was based on “voluntary censorship”. Creel believed that the newspapers would eventually embrace “voluntary censorship”. He asked, “Should it not have been their glad duty to aid enthusiastically in the provision of a veil of secrecy that meant larger safety for American ships and troops and larger chances for American military success?”<sup>17</sup> Creel had confidence in the fact that the media would want to help the cause and not hurt it. Newspapers would not want to be considered unpatriotic. Still, the papers were constantly attacking his actions.

George Creel was called “The Censor” by many in the newspaper business; he never understood why.<sup>18</sup> For one thing, he said was against harsh censorship. “... I was strongly opposed to the censorship bill.... It was not that I denied the need of some sort of censorship, but deep in my heart was the feeling that the desired results could be

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<sup>14</sup> Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, ix.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 21-23.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>18</sup> Larson and Mock, “The Lost Files of the Creel Committee of 1917-19”, 9.

obtained without paying a price that a formal law would have demanded.”<sup>19</sup> Another reason was that the CPI called for “voluntary censorship”, which meant the press could print articles that the Committee did not want to see published. “This voluntary agreement, having no force in law, and made possible only by patience, infinite labor, and the pressure of conscience upon the individual, was the Committee on Public Information’s one and only connection with censorship of any kind.”<sup>20</sup> In the end, the press decided to follow the guidelines of the CPI in order to receive information.

Some civil liberties were taken away during the war, but most of the public did not worry. “Patriotic hysteria had been rising during March [1917], and both individuals and organizations which formerly had opposed either militarism or certain militaristic threats to traditional American procedure came to realize that in war - even a ‘People’s War’ – normal civil liberties must be curtailed.”<sup>21</sup> Legislation that was passed was constantly argued over between the CPI, the President, and Congress. Both Wilson and the CPI wanted some form of censorship to protect national security. Congress was reluctant to pass any bills providing for censorship. “The conservatism of Congress was due undoubtedly both to a genuine desire to preserve constitutional rights and to a dislike for antagonizing the press which was bitterly hostile to censorship.”<sup>22</sup>

Although Congress opposed harsh censorship, during the war three acts were passed which aided in the CPI’s control of the press. “From the point of view of winning the war, which was the principal business of the day, the legislation was perhaps fairly

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<sup>19</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, 24 - 25.

<sup>22</sup> Carl Brent Swisher, “Civil Liberties in War Time,” *Political Science Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Sep., 1940): 324.

adequate. From the point of preservation of civil liberties, it was highly defective.”<sup>23</sup> Congress passed the Espionage Act in June 1917, which carried fines and time in prison for disclosing information affecting national security. The Trading-with-the-Enemy Act was put into effect in October of 1917. A Censorship Board was created with George Creel as one of the members. The objective of the board was to supervise international communications in order to protect national security. It also controlled mailing privileges of “disloyal publications”.<sup>24</sup> Lastly, the most drastic of the three acts, the Sedition Act, passed in May 1918, “provided for imprisonment up to twenty years and fines up to ten thousand dollars for any persons who ‘willfully utter, print, write or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States...’.”<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the war, the press seldom disregarded the CPI’s regulations. However, there was one incident which did cause Creel and the Committee some problems. During June 1917 transports were leaving for Europe. To minimize the chance of submarine attacks, the ships left in four separate groups. At this time, the CPI had not set up a system for cable censorship. The Associated Press somehow received information of the first transports arriving and wanted to publish it. If published, the other transports would be endangered. Then, Admiral Gleaves (Commander, Destroyer Force) sent a cable which described a U-boat attack.<sup>26</sup> Creel wanted to release the cable when the last group arrived safely, but those in high command in the navy refused. They believed the enemy could decipher the codes in the cable, putting others at risk.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 327.

<sup>24</sup>Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, 80.

<sup>25</sup>Turner, “Woodrow Wilson and Public Opinions”, 518.

<sup>26</sup>Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 29.

When an anonymous cable was sent a few days later stating that the submarine attacks never occurred, the press immediately demanded the cable from Admiral Gleaves, but again permission was denied. Creel met with a reporter from *The Tribune* the following day and stated why the cable could not be released, that it was a minor story, and the public would not understand its “cryptic” wording. The next day, almost every paper released a story that Creel supplied the facts from what he believed to be the truth. “His [Senator Penrose] resolution not only called for an investigation of the ‘Fourth of July Fake,’ but for an inquiry into every act and activity of the Committee.”<sup>27</sup>

Admiral Gleaves provided Creel with the document, which Creel then sent to the papers, but the Senate ignored it and the press simply printed “the last chapter in an unfortunate incident”.<sup>28</sup> Later, it was found that the original cable that was sent by the Associated Press was from an unknown source. Creel explains that, “The message sent as private – meaning that it was not intended for publication – thereby evading the censorship!”<sup>29</sup> This was only the beginning of the problems that the CPI and Creel would have to overcome.

The press attacks on Creel were nothing compared to the hostility of Congress. While delivering a speech in New York, Creel was asked about his thoughts on Congress. Creel jokingly responded that, “I had not been slumming for years.”<sup>30</sup> The next day, the press published his statement. Congress was in an uproar and demanded that Creel leave the CPI or the President would not receive the funds he wanted renewed for the year. Creel wrote an apology and spoke to Wilson. He told the President that he would resign,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 60.



but Wilson would not accept Creel's resignation. Creel went before Congress to explain the need for the appropriations and "to justify my official existence".<sup>31</sup> All believed that the CPI would not receive a penny to continue its work, but they were mistaken. Creel thought the CPI had won respect and approval of Congress when the hearing had ended. "...Republicans and Democrats were equally generous on the floor of the House, reporting that the work was important and that it had been discharged competently and patriotically."<sup>32</sup> The CPI received funds for \$1,250,000.<sup>33</sup> As Creel and the Committee would soon find out, Congress and the press would revert to their old ways and continue their attacks.

The CPI published "Regulations for the Periodical Press of the United States during the War"<sup>34</sup>, which classified news into three different categories: dangerous, questionable, and routine news. "Dangerous" news would be stories involving military or naval plans, attempts on the President's life, and any other such material that fell under strategies of battle. "Questionable" reports could only be published with the CPI's permission. For the most part, "Routine" news was published during World War I. The CPI was most concerned with newspapers publishing military information that might aid the enemy in winning the war. The Committee would then approve the news by either stamping "Passed by the Committee on Public Information" (published safely, but facts may be inaccurate) or "Authorized by the Committee on Public Information" (officially approved).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>34</sup> Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, 81.

<sup>35</sup> For more specific details on the news categories see: Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, 81-82.

The Committee on Public Information was divided into two sections (Domestic and Foreign) and had a total of eighteen subdivisions, all of which played a crucial role in the war. Each helped shape the public's image of the war in Europe. "The division of news was undoubtedly the most important from the committee's standpoint. It was the chief medium for issuing official war news..."<sup>36</sup> The Division of News was responsible for "live news" and was the only "central information bureau" during the war.<sup>37</sup> Papers would simply make one call and received accurate information without having to track down four or five different offices. Also, the division would "advise and interpret the government's requests for secrecy in the matter of purely military information."<sup>38</sup> Creel believed this division was valuable to both the press and the government. Of the more than six thousand releases that were published, only three were ever attacked for inaccuracies.<sup>39</sup>

The *Official Bulletin* was started in May 1917 and E.S. Rochester was appointed head of the publication. Wilson originally thought up the idea of having a bulletin that would strictly publish official acts, such as documents, statements, and orders. The bulletin would never write editorials, so it was never in competition with the press. Creel was against this idea, but later realized that the *Official Bulletin* was an important asset for the CPI. Even newspapers and Congress were originally opposed to the idea.

The *Official Bulletin* was published on a daily basis. Later, there was a five dollar charge a year in order to keep publication down because so many wanted a subscription. By August 1918 there were over one hundred eighteen thousand copies in circulation.

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<sup>36</sup> Larson and Mock, "The Lost Files of the Creel Committee of 1917-19", 14.

<sup>37</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 74.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>39</sup> Larson and Mock, "The Lost Files of the Creel Committee of 1917-19", 14.

“Even while Congress was attacking the *Official Bulletin* as useless expense, Senators and Representatives were hounding the Committee to have constituents placed on the free list, and when publication was suspended on April 1, 1919 there was not a voice raised except to beseech its continuance.”<sup>40</sup>

The Service Bureau was established in March 1918 by an executive order. This agency was the central service bureau for answering questions about the “war-machinery”. The division would respond by telephone, letter, or in-person meetings. It was estimated that over eighty-six thousand questions were answered by this bureau.

Another division that was vital to the CPI was the Division of Production and Distribution, which was responsible for the circulation of printed materials. The Boy Scouts of America were responsible for delivering speeches to households. According to Creel, the Boy Scouts distributed more than five million copies of the Flag Day speech to the public. “All told well over 13 million reprints of this one Wilson speech alone were distributed – representing about a sixth of all the pamphlets distributed – and if it be assumed that each was read by two persons, they reached roughly a quarter of the total American population at the time.”<sup>41</sup> Taking into account the available resources of the time, the Boy Scouts were a huge success in promoting the war.

The Four-Minute Men were also a key element in helping publicize the war effort. Creel was approached by Donald Ryerson, who introduced the idea of having volunteers make patriotic speeches at movie theaters. They were responsible for writing their own speeches, but received guidelines every two weeks or so. At intermission, the speaker would address the audience for about four minutes of a wide variety of topics. Some

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<sup>40</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 211.

<sup>41</sup> Elmer E. Cornwell Jr., “Wilson, Creel, and the Presidency,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (Summer, 1959): 192.

examples were: Red Cross, What Our Enemy Really Is, Why We Are Fighting, Eyes for the Navy, What Have We Won?, and Fourth Liberty Loan. At one point, President Wilson purchased a fifty dollar Third Liberty Loan and asked the people of America to match it. Later on, singing was introduced to the program and songs were chosen to be performed during intermission as well. Creel points out that of the 755,190 speeches made, 314,454,514 people were reached.<sup>42</sup>

The Division of Women's War-Work was created in November of 1917. It was responsible for pushing the war effort in newspapers, magazines, churches, women's organizations, and schools. Many working in this division received letters from women about the war. They responded to each letter with the thought of helping each individual. At the peak of their success, the division was refused funds to continue their work because the government felt they "were trespassing upon a field already occupied by the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense."<sup>43</sup>

The Division of Work with the Foreign-Born was compiled of many different leagues whose members spoke different languages. It was their job to stir up American loyalty among immigrants. Their message reached thousands via meetings, pamphlets, and newspapers. "The real America had to be revealed to these foreign-language groups... and their minds had to be filled with tremendous truth that the fight against Germany was a fight for all that life has taught decent human beings to hold dear."<sup>44</sup>

The Division of Pictorial Publicity headed by Dana Gibson was in charge of poster designs. Artists from all over the country came to offer their talents for the war

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<sup>42</sup> For more information and numbers on the Four-Minute Men see: Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 84 – 98.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

effort. These artists produced more than 1,400 designs during the war. The division only cost the government a little over thirteen thousand dollars. "... America had more posters than any other belligerent, and, what is more to the point, they were the best. They called to our own people from every hoarding like great clarions, and they went through the world, captioned in every language, carrying a message that thrilled and inspired."<sup>45</sup> This division not only made an impression in the United States, but carried its vision all around the world.

The posters created in World War I had many functions. For example, the illustrations inspired Americans to conserve resources, ration food, buy war bonds, and volunteer for service.<sup>46</sup> The word "war" was hardly mentioned in posters. War bonds were referred to as "Liberty Bonds". Perhaps the most recognizable poster of World War I was James Montgomery Flagg's "I Want You for U.S. Army". Gibson girls also made their appearances in many posters in order to sell the war. Next to films and newspapers, posters had an enormous influence on the image of the war.<sup>47</sup>

The Bureau of Cartoons was established in May 1918. The bureau would send a weekly bulletin to leading cartoonists with suggestions for ideas the government wanted promoted that month. Cartoons ranged from food conservation to buying Liberty Loans. "This made for timeliness and unity of cartoon power which developed into a stimulating and actively constructive force for shaping public opinion and winning the war."<sup>48</sup>

The Advertising Division of the CPI was created under an executive order in April 1917. William H. Johns was chairman. He decided what agency or agencies would

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 133. Also see attached poem.

<sup>46</sup> See attached poem: Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, 188.

<sup>47</sup> See attached posters.

<sup>48</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 226.

prepare copies for distribution that needed to be made for a certain week. Then the Division of Pictorial Publicity would design the advertisement. Once the ads were ready, the Advertising Division circulated the copies to newspapers, billboards, magazines, and other such places. By the end of the war, this division saved the government over five million dollars in advertising.

The Film Division was created in September of 1917. Charles S. Hart was appointed the director of the division. There were five basic functions that this division followed:

1. Cooperation with photographers of the Signal Corps and the Navy in preparing and handling pictures they had taken.
2. Writing of scenarios and issuance of permits for commercial films about government work.
3. Production of the documentary films made entirely by the CPI, most of which were finished after the Armistice.
4. Distribution and promotion of war films whether taken by our own government, the Allies, or private producers.
5. Cooperation with the Foreign Film Division in the export of pictures to CPI agents abroad.<sup>49</sup>

Also, the CPI controlled what foreign films were let into America. “The CPI also assumed the role of censor, banning for foreign distribution films that featured scenes of strikes, labor protests, poverty, or domestic violence.”<sup>50</sup>

At the start of the war, the CPI decided to produce “documentaries” and not compete with commercial business. Creel described how the CPI produced negatives. He explained that photos taken by the Signal Corps were sent (undeveloped) to the Chief of Staff. The pictures were then “combed” and “proper” material was released for public

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<sup>49</sup> Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, 137.

<sup>50</sup> Steven J. Ross, “Struggles for the Screen: Workers, Radicals, and the Political Uses of Silent Film,” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (April, 1991): 347.

viewing.<sup>51</sup> Later on, the feature-picture program was put in use, in order to get full use of the “film’s patriotic possibilities”.<sup>52</sup> In order to reach the greatest number of Americans, the CPI charged a rental rate based on the movie house’s average earnings. This allowed many places to run government films. Hart determined what the best material to use was and made them into seven-reel features. The first feature-film was “Pershing’s Crusaders,” which grossed over one hundred eighty thousand dollars.

The greatest “hate” film of the time was *The Kaiser, the Beast of Berlin*. In one week, it reached more than fourteen thousand people in Omaha, Nebraska alone.<sup>53</sup> A sign was posted allowing any pro-Germans free admission into the theatre and not one person took the offer. The Film Division was greatly responsible for promoting propaganda during the war. Creel stated in a letter to Hart that, “I believe in the motion picture just as I believe in the press, and in my work it plays just as powerful a part in the production of an aroused and enlightened war sentiment.”<sup>54</sup>

The CPI assumed full responsibility over war exhibitions in March of 1918. The whole idea began when representatives of state fairs came to Creel and asked for a war exhibit. All types of weapons were shown, along with reenactments of battles in the afternoon, and booths showed how sailors and soldiers lived daily. This was all used to show the taxpayer how his money was being spent in the war. Still, Congress did not believe there was a need for war exhibitions. In the end, the exhibitions made a profit of over four hundred thousand dollars.

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<sup>51</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 119.

<sup>52</sup> Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, 138.

<sup>53</sup> For review of film in 1918 see: Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, 152.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

Creel appointed Guy Stanton Ford as chairman of the Division of Civic and Educational Cooperation. “We wanted to reach the people through their minds, rather than through their emotions, for hate has its undesirable reactions. ...not by over-emphasis of historical appeal, but by unanswerable arguments that would make every man and woman know that the war was a war of self-defense that had to be waged if free institutions were not to perish.”<sup>55</sup> This division was responsible for writing pieces on why we entered the war and historical information on the war for the public. The National School Service (publication of Division of Civic and Educational Cooperation) was of special importance in promoting the war. This paper was sent to public schools all over the United States. It aided teachers in explaining the war to children. “Each issue contained, generally, a ‘leading article’ or two, a summary of major war events during the preceding two weeks, a series of timely shorter articles, boxes containing quotations, and then a considerable amount of material prepared for direct classroom use.”<sup>56</sup> The monthly paper would give examples of math problems, songs, games, poems, and stories. One example of a math problem was: “If John saves five cents each day for five days, how many Thrift Stamps can he buy?”<sup>57</sup> Some schools even dropped German as a language course to act more patriotic. It was estimated that the messages in these papers reached over twenty million homes in America, which proved to be very successful.<sup>58</sup>

The CPI had an enormous impact on the image of the war. Each division played a vital role in promoting the war on the homefront. The numbers alone speak for how

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<sup>55</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 100.

<sup>56</sup> Cornwell, “Wilson, Creel, and the Presidency”, 196.

<sup>57</sup> *National School Service*, 1 September 1918, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Cornwell, “Wilson, Creel, and the Presidency”, 196.



successful the CPI was in distributing information during war time.<sup>59</sup> Although the committee achieved their objectives, the controversy over whether or not the CPI was a propaganda agency remained an issue not only during, but also after the war.

After the war, Creel published *How We Advertised America* and gave an analysis of the Committee on Public Information. He still believed that, “In no degree was the Committee an agency of censorship, a machinery of concealment or repression. Its emphasis throughout was on the open and the positive. At no point did it seek or exercise authorities under those war laws that limited the freedom of speech and press.”<sup>60</sup> The illustrations, films, and publications of the CPI prove Creel was mistaken in denying that the committee was a propaganda agency.

The civil liberties taken away from Americans during the war were just the beginning of the CPI’s control in the war. The slightest opposition to the war made an individual appear to be an enemy. Hardly any person who was against the war spoke out, in fear of being arrested, fined, and thought of as a traitor. Creel insisted that the committee didn’t violate anyone’s civil liberties during the war. “At no time did the Committee exercise or seek authorities under the war measures that limited the peacetime freedom of individuals or professions.”<sup>61</sup>

Posters were also proof that the Creel Committee was a propaganda agency. Germans were portrayed as “Huns”, barbarians, murderers, apes, and worse. Posters depicted women being carried off by a German ape to be raped and slaughtered. The color red (blood) appeared on almost every poster with German soldiers, showing them

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<sup>59</sup> See Appendix II in Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 455 – 459.

<sup>60</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

as the murderous villains. The American soldiers were portrayed marching into battle to save the world from the enemy. This type of propaganda campaign was very successful.

Films also had the Germans playing the villains, while the Americans were the heroes. The campaign to allow pro-Germans free admission into a film showed how patriotic people were. What individual would have admitted in front of hundreds of people that they were pro-German? The CPI was hoping Americans would respond by paying admission and denying that they were pro-German. This example again proved that propaganda was spreading across the United States.

Although newspapers were allowed to print most stories, “voluntary censorship” was not very voluntary. If the press didn’t follow the CPI’s suggestions, the media would not receive certain information from the committee. “... Mr. Creel had the power to crack down on any newspaper or periodical....”<sup>62</sup> In other words, in order to stay in the loop, the press accepted “voluntary censorship”.

Lastly, schools played a major role in spreading propaganda during the war. Children would hear poems and essays explaining why America entered the war. History lessons taught students that Germany was evil and always had been. In some schools, learning the German language was taken off the curriculum. Children were greatly influenced by these tactics, all of which were suggestions from the CPI.

On June 30, 1919 the Committee on Public Information was put out of existence. Americans greatly relied on the information that the Committee provided for them. The CPI influenced citizens to give their time, money, and energy in order to win the war. The role the CPI played in the war was best stated by Creel, “The Committee on Public Information was called into existence to make this fight for the ‘verdict of mankind,’ the

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<sup>62</sup> Larson and Mock, *Words that Won the War*, 84.

voice created to plead the justice of America's cause before the jury of Public Opinion."<sup>63</sup> Although the committee used propaganda to get their message across, the CPI was successful in selling the war to the public. The Creel Committee achieved its goal in a few years and proved that propaganda was a powerful weapon in war, which could influence a majority in a short span of time.

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<sup>63</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 4.

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Thoughts Inspired By A War-Time Billboard

*By Wallace Irwin*

I stand by a fence on a peaceable street  
 And gaze on the posters in colors of flame,  
 Historical documents, sheet upon sheet,  
 Of our share in the war ere the armistice came.

And I think about Art as a Lady-at-Arms;  
 She's a studio character most people say,  
 With a feminine trick of displaying her charms  
 In a manner to puzzle the ignorant lay.

But now as I study that row upon row  
 Of wind-blown engravings I feel satisfaction  
 Deep down in my star-spangled heart, for I know  
 How Art put on khaki and went into action.

There are posters for drives – now triumphantly o'er –  
 I look with a smile reminiscently fond  
 As mobilized Fishers and Christys implore  
 In a feminine voice, "Win the War – Buy a Bond!"

There's a Jonas Lie shipbuilder, fit for a frame;  
 Wallie Morg's "Feed a Fighter" lurks deep in his trench;  
 There's Blashfield's Columbia setting her name  
 In classical draperies, trimmed by the French.

Charles Livingston Bull in marine composition  
 Exhorts us to Hooverize (portrait of bass).  
 Jack Sheridan tells us that Food's Ammunition –  
 We've all tackled war biscuits under that class.

See the winged Polish warrior that Benda has wrought!  
 Is he private or captain? I cannot tell which,  
 For printed below is the patriot thought  
 Which Poles pronounce "Śladami Ojcow Naszych."

There's the Christy Girl wishing that she was a boy,  
 There's Leyendecker coaling for Garfield in jeans,  
 There's the Montie Flagg guy with air of fierce joy  
 Inviting the public to Tell the Marines.

And the noble Six Thousand – they count up to that –  
 Are marshaled before me in battered review.  
 They have uttered a thought that is All in One Hat  
 In infinite shadings of red, white, and blue.

And if brave Uncle Sam – Dana Gibson, please bow –  
 Has called for our labors as never before,  
 Let him stand in salute in acknowledgment now  
 Of the fighters that trooped from the studio door.

Said the Workman to the Soldier

*By Edgar A. Guest*

Said the workman to the soldier, as his ship put out to sea:  
 “While you’re over there for freedom, you can safely bank on me!  
 I’ll be just as brave as you are, in a safer sort of way,  
 And I’ll keep production going every minute of the day.”

Said the soldier to the workman, as the ship put out to sea:  
 “I’ll be true to you, my brother, if you’ll just be true to me!  
 Now we’ve got to work together; it’s my job to bear a gun,  
 But it’s yours to keep on toiling if we’re going to lick the Hun.”

Said the workman to the soldier: “I will back you to the last.  
 No more strikes for higher wages till the danger time is passed!”  
 Said the soldier to the workman: “I’m for you and you’re for me.  
 Now we understand each other, let the ship put out to sea.”

Songs

"A Khaki Lad"

"All of No Man's Land Is Ours"

"Hail! Hail! The Gang's All Here!"

"How 'Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm (After They've Seen Patee?)"

"It's a Long Long Way to Tipperary"

"My Belgian Rose"

"Oh! How I Hate To Get Up In the Morning"

**"Over There"** (Most popular song of the war)

"Out In No Man's Land"

"Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag and Smile, Smile, Smile"

"Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers"

"Take Me Back To Dear Old Blighty"

"Till We Meet Again"

"When Yankee Doodle Learns to Parlez Vous Francais"

"Where Do We Go From Here Boys (Where Do We Go From Here)"

**Over There**

Johnnie, get your gun,  
 Get your gun, get your gun,  
 Take it on the run,  
 On the run, on the run.  
 Hear them calling, you and me,  
 Every son of liberty.  
 Hurry right away,  
 No delay, no delay,  
 Make your daddy glad  
 To have had such a lad.  
 Tell your sweetheart not pine,  
 To be proud her boy's in line.

Chorus

Over there, over there,  
 Send the word, send the word over there—  
 That the Yanks are coming,  
 The Yanks are coming,  
 The drums rum-tumming  
 Ev'rywhere.  
 So prepare, say a pray'r,  
 Send the word, send the word to beware.  
 We'll be over, we're coming over,  
 And we won't come back till it's over  
 Over there.

Johnnie, get your gun,  
 Get your gun, get your gun,  
 Johnnie show the Hun  
 Who's a son of a gun.  
 Hoist the flag and let her fly,  
 Yankee Doodle do or die.  
 Pack your little kit,  
 Show your grit, do your bit.  
 Yankee Doodle fill the ranks,  
 From the towns and the tanks.  
 Make your mother proud of you,  
 And the old Red, White and Blue.

*(repeat chorus twice)*