

The US in WWI: competing perspectives

Resolution of the Socialist Party, April 1917:

Modern wars as a rule had been caused by the commercial and financial rivalry and intrigues of the capitalist interests in the different countries. Whether they have been frankly waged as wars of aggression or have been hypocritically represented as wars of "defense," they have always been made by the classes and fought by the masses. Wars bring wealth and power to the ruling classes, and suffering, death, and demoralization to the workers.... We, therefore, call upon the workers of all countries to refuse support to their governments in their wars. The wars of the contending national groups of capitalists are not the concern of the workers. The only struggle which would justify the workers in taking up arms is the great struggle of the working class of the world to free itself from economic exploitation and political oppression, and we particularly warn the workers against the snare and delusion of so-called defensive warfare. As against the false doctrine of national patriotism we uphold the idea of international working-class solidarity. In support of capitalism, we will not willingly give a single life or a single dollar; in support of the struggle of the workers for freedom we pledge our all.

Woodrow Wilson's war message, April 1917:

While we do these things, these deeply momentous things, let us be very clear, and make very clear to all the world what our motives and our objects are.... Our object now, as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power and to set up amongst the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and action as will henceforth ensure the observance of these principles.... We are at the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong done shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states.

Wisconsin Loyalty Legion, November 1917:

Since the war broke out in Europe and especially since our Country became involved in it, Wisconsin has been infested with a clique who call themselves socialists and some others who do not make that excuse, who have preached and taught discord and opposition.... Their teachings are of the brand advocated in that now infamous resolution adopted at their last convention held in St. Louis last summer, in which the working people of our Country were advised to resist by "mass action" if necessary, the provisions of the then proposed conscription law.... "Anything to help Germany win the war" seems to be their sole excuse for existing, and to do that they seem to be willing to do anything, in any Country.... In order to counteract this epidemic of "Kaiserism" insofar as possible or to stamp it out entirely if it can be done, a number of Real Americans in our state got together and organized what is called the Wisconsin Loyalty Legion... the only requirement to membership being that they be AMERICANS first, last, and all the time, ready to support our government in whatever it may undertake at any and all times.