

ject's significance and character strengths, this biography is a competent and professional study of the originator of the now-commonplace high-level interview.

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*Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information.* By Stephen Vaughn. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980. Pp. xiv, 397. Illustrations, notes, essay on sources, bibliography, index. \$21.00.)

During the past decade several worthwhile books and articles that treat domestic aspects of America's involvement in World War I have appeared. Stephen Vaughn's *Holding Fast the Inner Lines*, a highly detailed institutional history of the Committee on Public Information (CPI), is an important addition to that list. The CPI, a short-lived agency created by executive order in April, 1917, had as its task the mobilization of public opinion in support of World War I as a crusade to save democracy.

The thesis of the book is clearly articulated. Vaughn argues that the organizers of the CPI, as well as the high-minded journalists, academics, and social workers who carried out its program, were progressive liberals who saw the agency not merely as a propaganda ministry but also as an instrument for national reform to educate citizens in their responsibilities in a democratic society at war. George Creel, who promoted himself as the chairman of the agency, is the major figure in Vaughn's account. A journalist with little formal education, Creel infused the CPI with his own naive faith in America's democracy, its citizens, and the justice of its cause in the war against German militarism and authoritarianism.

After recounting the origins of the CPI and the relationship of the reformers to its purposes, structure, and personnel, Vaughn describes the literature the agency's several divisions produced to define democracy, justify American intervention, and indict "the German menace." In Creel's view, the task of the CPI was to be approached positively. Unassimilated immigrants, including German-Americans, were not to be threatened or harassed. Instead he hoped to lead them to strong loyalty to America and its democratic ideals through the agency's educational programs. Nevertheless, much of the CPI prop-

aganda was immoderate. Despite the efforts of historian Guy Stanton Ford, the head of the Division of Civic and Educational Publications, to hold his academic writers to proper standards of documentation, much of the material aimed at Germany was fabrication. Caught up in the emotionalism of the war effort, CPI authors often sought to generate fear of what they understood to be the brutal, depraved nature of the enemy.

Vaughn also describes the activities of the National School Service, a CPI branch charged with promoting patriotism in the schools, and the Division of News, which produced a great quantity of news releases, all factual but infused with the nationalist assumptions of the progressive reformers. Particularly revealing are thirty pages of reproductions of CPI posters produced by a group of well-known American artists led by Charles Dana Gibson. Some of these creations are unrestrained in their presentation of Germany as a plundering, raping, mutilating enemy.

Vaughn's book is thoroughly researched, intelligently organized, and clearly written. Originally a dissertation done at Indiana University, it is somewhat overblown as a book. The notes and bibliography taken together constitute more than a third of the entire volume. Its main point, the relationship of the nationalistic reformers to the prosecution of the war on the home front, is convincing but non-controversial and possibly could have been made just as well in a carefully crafted article.

The book is also weakened by what the author chose not to do. By limiting himself to a description of the CPI and its activities and eschewing analysis of its effectiveness, Vaughn leaves many important questions unanswered. Did the CPI accomplish its goals? Was the war effort aided by this agency? Did it genuinely threaten American liberties? Were the American people actually motivated by the CPI to support the war? Were some people offended by its blatant propaganda but afraid to object? Was the CPI actually instrumental in creating a legacy of anti-Germanism in American society? Until such questions are probed we can learn relatively little about the role of propaganda in American history from the example of the CPI.

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