

To be Truly British We Must Be Anti-German New Zealand, Enemy Aliens and the Great War Experience, 1914-1919

By Andrew Francis. Peter Lang, Oxford, 2012.

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Reviewed by Steven Loveridge

'To be Truly British we must be Anti-German' was a statement voiced by Mrs Ida Boeufve to the Women's Anti-German League at a 1916 rally in Napier. The attitudes and social forces backing that declaration form the subject of Andrew Francis's recent book on the treatment of New Zealand's German-speaking settlers during the First World War. Adapted from his PhD research, *To be Truly British We Must Be Anti-German* approaches the period not simply to catalogue wartime anti-Germanism in its own right, but to consider the extent to which larger developments - immigration patterns, conceptions of collective identity and citizenship - set the tone for wartime reaction. This effort to contextualize anti-alienism in New Zealand's war effort and larger history is taken one step further by considering the subject within a comparative context.

Those interested in this area will recognize that this approach addresses some conspicuous historiographical holes. As Francis rightly notes, there is a dearth of literature considering the New Zealand homefront (p.5). This is perhaps best recognized in how Paul Baker's study of the implementation of conscription remains a rather lonely landmark in investigations of social/cultural aspects of New Zealand's Great War experience, despite being published over two decades ago. Like that text, Francis's analysis of a particular aspect of the war effort - i.e. the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion - provides an excellent window from which to perceive wartime New Zealand. Additionally, aside from the welcome endeavour to contemplate wartime developments within the world in which they occurred, the text possesses a wider utility and will interest those concerned with New Zealand's German connection, immigration, xenophobia, the roles of government and media in social movements, social intolerance and civil rights.

As that last paragraph implies, the book surveys an impressive width of subjects and covers a surprising amount of material within its 299 pages. This is largely accomplished by devoting its eight chapters to different aspects of anti-alienism. The book investigates pre-war immigration and anti-alienism; how the war reinforced notions that loyalty and identity were dependent upon British kinship; how perceptions of collective identity influenced perceptions of naturalization and the enemy; how the internment of aliens was carried out; the place of public opinion in the von Zedlitz affair; the dynamics of trade boycott; and how New Zealand's response to enemy aliens compares with Canada's.

There is a lot to like about this approach and its results. The ideological overview of inclusion and exclusion lend a theoretical underlay to the study, whilst chapters set at closer magnifications put a human face on events, such as the von Zedlitz affair or the treatment of interned aliens on Somes Island - the strongest chapter in my mind. An effective use of visual sources - cartoons, photographs and a map - complement efforts to present some of the colour of the subject. One gripe here though, is the cramped and poorly formatted nature of the reproductions; full page pictures might be expected for a book currently retailing at around \$140. The balance between investigating historical causation and recognition of human experiences is further served by the poise of the author's prose. Francis' investigation of anti-alien legislation, dismissals, restrictions, campaigns, internment, hate crimes and riots, is conducted in an even and sober tone which facilitates an investigation of these volatile episodes without becoming polemical.

For the most part this tone is supported by a comprehensible and functional writing style. Unfortunately, this standard is not always maintained and there is a habit of making

claims that would benefit from more context, better qualification and/or clearer phrasing. For instance, Ian McGibbon's observation that 'the assassination in Sarajevo at the end of June 1914 barely raised an eyebrow in New Zealand', is critiqued with the assertion that 'In fact, it appears that Britain's declaration of war and the "showdown" of war with Germany had been inevitable for a considerable time' (p.51). This is a clear case of apples and oranges; ignorance about the diplomatic complexities that would erupt from the murder of an obscure Austrian Archduke is reconcilable with an awareness of the possibility of a war with Germany. While this is a rather inconsequential example, sometime these leaps in logic make for odd reading. The concluding chapter, for example, notes that New Zealand society struggled with the logistics of repatriation, the death toll which resulted from the influenza pandemic and the pressures of post-war economic downturn. 'In this atmosphere', we are told, 'anti-alien antagonism lost its bite' (p.261). However, given that sentiments that aliens were taking work from veterans have been well documented and that economic and legal restrictions continued in the post-war world, this claim is potentially misleading and requires clarification.

Returning to the theoretical underlay, the book makes a welcomed effort to inject more sophistication into understanding the homefront's social/cultural landscape. In investigating the social dynamics that gave force to anti-Germanism, Francis examines aspects of the public, the press and New Zealand's political realm. His findings offer a fascinating approach to questions of who was setting the pace. Perhaps the most stimulating observations concern recognition of the unattractive position the wartime government found itself in and the challenges it faced in navigating public tensions. It is in charting these public tensions that Francis introduces wider forces as the drivers of wartime anti-alienism. Indeed, a major assertion of the work is that 'the level of intolerance developed towards enemy aliens throughout the conflict was far too deep and sustained to be explained as a simple knee-jerk response to wartime conditions.' Instead, Francis notes, it was 'a product of late-Victorian and Edwardian growing unease over continental European settlement in the Dominions and the metropolitan centre' (p.4).

Within New Zealand, the argument runs, patriotic citizenship became underpinned by a British identity expressed through imperial kinship. Come wartime, this mode of thinking intensified existing tensions around the settlement of peoples from outside the British Isles. Facets of this ideology are detected in the response to British entry into the war, in how little naturalization counted as proof of loyalty in public attitudes, and in appeals to strengthen pan-British trade links. It is an intriguing hypothesis backed with good data and I suspect it will point the way for future research. Particularly interesting is the effort to contextualize New Zealand's anti-alienism by examining Canada as another British, settler-society with an established imperial identity. This comparative analysis is thoughtful and insightful, and I was left wanting more (room for a sequel perhaps?). My only critique is that the choice of Canada for a detailed comparison might have been more strongly justified; would Australia not have provided a more comparable example of a British, settler-society facing questions similar to New Zealand?

In considering the pre-war experiences of European settlers who fell under suspicion during the war, the book acknowledges that it does not cover non-European immigrants, such as Indians or the Chinese (p.18). This decision allows Francis to contextualize developing tensions around non-British Europeans as well as to contrast wartime treatment with the pre-war situation. However, this strikes me as a missed opportunity in that non-European immigrants provide some of the clearest examples of the ethnocentrism under exploration. Indeed a major conclusion notes that 'the hatred and freely expressed hostility from press, public and politicians alike led to racial and economically based legislation which aimed at restricting their [Chinese] immigration ... [and] employment opportunities' (p.262). The

connections between such behaviour and wartime anti-Germanism beg to be explored in more detail – especially considering the wartime habit of ‘easternizing’ Germans as ‘Huns’. Additionally, it also would have been interesting to read Francis’ thoughts upon the place of Catholic-Irish and Maori in regards to his thesis. These groups might have provided revealing perspectives on the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and how they were patrolled and negotiated. As it is, I was left unconvinced by the disclaimer that ‘Given its importance it [the Catholic-Irish experience] deserves a separate study’ (p.6).

Moreover, the book’s introduction of wider social forces often lacks a satisfactory schema to indicate how they operated in the public sphere. To give an example, Edwardian Britain is tagged with running a ‘systematic campaign’ to vilify Germany within literature, song and satirical magazines. By 1914, it is noted, ‘a generation of young Britons had been systematically exposed to the emerging stereotype of the evil, untrustworthy German’ (p.54). However, stereotypes of Germany circa 1914 might speak more of the bellicose sabre-rattling of Wilhelminism Germany than *Punch’s* agenda, and there is a habit of uncritically attributing power, motive and ‘systematic’ coherence to cultural movements. There is little consideration of how individual or communal agency related to such media; the social body is, too often, simply noted as manipulated. Indeed one of the major conclusions notes the shape of anti-alienism as ‘in a large part due to a virulent press campaign [and anti-German organizations], which manipulated a pliable public’ (p.265). Such assertions beg salient questions; how large a part did the press and these organizations play? Why was the public so pliable? Was the press exceptionally anti-alien/German? If so, then why?

Some of these ambiguities are reflected in the vagueness of the concluding statement that ‘it was the war itself, combined with a number of internal and external factors, which laid the foundations and provided the impetus for the harsh treatment heaped on enemy aliens’ (p.262). Aside from the dubious value of lumping war and unspecified ‘factors’ as responsible for the shape of anti-alienism, this assessment that the war ‘laid the foundations’ appears somewhat at odds with the major thesis pursued – i.e. that ‘the level of intolerance developed towards enemy aliens throughout the conflict was far too deep and sustained to be explained as a simple knee-jerk response to wartime conditions’ (p.4). Ultimately it is left somewhat unclear to what extent the treatment of enemy aliens circa 1914-1918 should be perceived as indicative of abnormal wartime behaviours and to what extent it speaks of deeper characteristics of the New Zealand society under investigation.

There is no need to turn this review into a debate upon conceptual frameworks built and not built - especially ones over which I suspect the author and I might go back and forth on. *To be Truly British We Must Be Anti-German* is likely to remain the go to book on the subject for some time and in this it will serve as a valuable resource. If it is also an indication of a growing interest in New Zealand’s homefront history and how it might be developed, then we have much to look forward to.