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Review of The Lusitania by Colin Simpson

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age of a bill ensuring the right of U.S. companies to stake claims and mine deep sea minerals, despite U.N. opposition. (Source: "NACOA Backs Industry Ocean Bills," *Science*, Oct. 17, 1975)

• **Competition.** One of the most anti-competitive Federal laws, the Robinson-Patman Act, is coming under strong criticism within the administration. The 1936

statute prohibits manufacturers and wholesalers from offering quantity discounts, and has been shown to substantially reduce price competition. The White House Domestic Council therefore invited a group of economists, lawyers, and businessmen to attend an intensive review of the law's effects on Dec. 8-10. The reconsideration of Robinson-Patman is part of

the administration's ongoing drive to reduce costly government regulation. (Source: "Debate Building Over Price Law," AP (Washington), Nov. 25, 1975) □

This column reports trends in the advancement of individual liberty and the rediscovery of economic freedom. Readers are invited to submit material of potential interest.

book review

THE LUSITANIA. By Colin Simpson. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1972. 303 pp., \$8.95 (hb), \$1.75 (pb).

Reviewed by Jeffrey Rogers Hummel

"War is the health of the state" reads one libertarian button, and that statement contains more than simply a modicum of truth. Every war in which the U.S. government has engaged, without exception, has been a categorical disaster for liberty. Fortunately, prior to 1860, U.S. wars were only temporary setbacks in the general, overall trend towards increasing freedom and decreasing state power. It was not until the War Between the States that this trend was reversed and America started its retreat from the goal of liberty and its descent into statism. More than any other event the Civil War, with its introduction of conscription and income taxation, with Lincoln's widespread suppression of civil liberties in the North, and with the first really intimate contact between America's nascent industries and government, can be identified as the turning point in American history. Every war since has merely accelerated the growth of state power. But if the War Between the States was the turning point, World War I, as Murray Rothbard has pointed out in his excellent essay, "War Collectivism in World War I," (in *A New History of Leviathan*) was "the model, the precedent, and the inspiration for state corporate-capitalism for the remainder of the twentieth century."

Because "war is the health of the state," because governments, when they wage war on foreign powers, always concurrently wage war on their own citizens, we should be acutely interested in the work of the revisionist historians who seek to discredit and expose official explanations that "justify" participating in war. Until now, the most thorough revisionist account of the United States' entry into World War I has been Charles Callan Tansill's *America Goes to War*, but the recent publication of Colin Simpson's *The Lusitania* has greatly supplemented that previous work. *The Lusitania*, of course, was a British

liner which on May 7, 1915, was torpedoed by a German submarine. Non-combatants numbering 1,201, including 128 Americans, lost their lives. At the time, the sinking of an unarmed passenger liner without any warning was viewed in this country as a shocking case of German bestiality, and this greatly assisted the Wilson administration in its efforts to propel the United States into the war. Tansill and other revisionists have pointed out that Americans should have known that a certain degree of risk was entailed in traveling on belligerent vessels, especially since the German Embassy had published a warning in New York newspapers just prior to the *Lusitania's* embarkation. However, Simpson has contributed a well-researched and scholarly investigation that uncovers government perfidy even unsuspected by Tansill.

Simpson touches upon topics that range from the design and construction of the *Lusitania* to the operations of British intelligence in the United States. His most relevant conclusions, however, can be briefly summarized as follows: (a) the *Lusitania* was an auxiliary of the British navy; (2) it carried munitions and contraband; (3) it was armed; (4) negligence on the part of the British Admiralty was partially responsible for its loss, and that negligence was probably deliberate and premeditated; and (5) Captain Turner, the *Lusitania's* master, was the innocent victim of a British Government attempt to frame him as responsible for the disaster.

The first of these points is not new and has long been known by historians. The *Lusitania* was built by Cunard Company with subsidies from the British Government, according to government specifications, and was subject to transfer for government wartime use. With the opening of World War I, the ship fell under Admiralty instructions authorizing the subterfuge of flying the U.S. flag and requiring an attempt to ram any German submarine which, in accordance with the Cruiser Rules, had surfaced. The Cruiser Rules required warships to warn unarmed merchant vessels prior to sinking or cap-

ture and were the basis of the British and U.S. position that the British surface blockade of Germany was legal and moral, while the German submarine blockade of England was illegal and wicked.

The second point, concerning the nature of the *Lusitania's* cargo, has also been known, at least since October 1935 when Thomas Bailey revealed in an article appearing in the *American Historical Review* that the *Lusitania's* final manifest indicated she was carrying over 4,000 cases of rifle cartridges. Simpson, however, goes much deeper, examining closely the huge British purchasing operation run in the United States through Cunard and J. P. Morgan, with the countenance of the collector of the Port of New York, Dudley Field Malone. He reveals that the *Lusitania* was also carrying 1,248 cases of 3-inch shrapnel shells and other shipments variously labelled as furs, butter, and cheese, but undoubtedly munitions. Simpson also presents evidence that it was carrying large quantities of pyroxyline (guncotton), a substance that causes an explosion upon contact with sea water, although the evidence is not totally conclusive, mostly because the crucial private papers of Captains Hall and Gaunt of Naval Intelligence have still not been declassified by the British government.

Part of the importance of establishing the nature of the cargo stems from the fact that the *Lusitania* sank in 18 minutes, one of the reasons for the huge loss of life. German torpedoes were notoriously unreliable. The submarine which attacked it, the *U-20*, had earlier failed to sink the steamer *Candidate* with a torpedo and had to use the deck gun. The same day the *U-20* fired two torpedoes, one at point-blank range, into the *Candidate's* sister ship, the *Centurion*, and she took one hour and 20 minutes to go under, with no loss of life. Most survivors of the *Lusitania* remembered two explosions, and popular and official opinion in Britain and the United States attributed that to a second and possibly a third torpedo. That explanation was discredited, however, when the diary of Captain Schwiager,

commander of the *U-20*, was reprinted in the *Journal of Modern History* (September 1936), establishing that only one torpedo was fired and hit the *Lusitania*. One of the services rendered by Simpson is his detailed reconstruction of the pattern of flooding in the *Lusitania*, based on his intimate knowledge of her design coupled with his conclusion that the torpedo detonated the munitions.

A final matter deserves treatment under the question of contraband. The Germans charged that the liner was being used to transport troops, but that charge has never been given much credence. Simpson notes that along with a last minute transfer from the *Queen Margaret* to the *Lusitania* of 2,000 cases of ammunition never appearing on the final manifest, there was also a contingent of soldiers from the 6th Winnipeg Rifles dressed in civilian clothes.

More important than munitions is the question of whether or not the *Lusitania* was armed. It has been known that it was designed to carry 12 six-inch quick-firing guns, giving her a more lethal broadside than even *Bacchante* class cruisers. Two British publications which were standard issue on all German submarines, *Jane's Fighting Ships 1914* and *The Naval Annual 1914*, listed the *Lusitania* as armed. The fact that the Admiral-

ty never employed it as a cruiser as originally envisaged, however, has been cited as proof that the guns were never mounted. Simpson, by inspecting the Cunard records, discovered that between May 21 and July 21, 1913, the liner was drydocked for modifications, including the addition of 12 gun rings hidden below trap doors on the deck. After the war began, between August 8 and September 17, 1914, the ship was again detained, and the Admiralty closed off a large portion of the shelter (C) deck and installed the actual guns.

Of all Simpson's allegations, obviously the most startling is that of Admiralty complicity in the sinking. In support, Simpson reveals that Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, commissioned a study by Commander Kenworthy of Naval Intelligence on the results of a liner being sunk with Americans on board. Two days before the *Lusitania's* sinking, the *Juno*, which had been assigned the duty of escorting the *Lusitania* upon her arrival off the southern coast of Ireland, was ordered to Queenstown by the Admiralty for reasons unknown. This action was taken despite the fact that the British had broken the German naval code, were consequently able to determine the approximate location of every German submarine, and knew that the *Lusitania* was heading on a course that would take her directly

into the path of the *U-20*. Furthermore, Captain Turner on the *Lusitania* was not advised of this decision and was still expecting to rendezvous with the *Juno* when the torpedo struck. No official explanation for this action exists. For years the Admiralty denied it had taken place, and the Admiralty War Diary stops short just before the point at which the decision was made. As Simpson charges: "It was an incredible decision by any standards and can only be explained on two grounds: that both Churchill and Fisher were so preoccupied with the Dardanelles and their personal problems that they failed to appreciate it; or that it was the pinnacle of Churchill's higher strategy of embroiling the U-boats with a neutral power." (p. 130)

Moreover, the *Juno* recall has an even more incredible sequel that emerges in the account of the actual sinking. Simpson's journalistic training and talent keep the reader engrossed and horrified as he describes the confusion and mayhem aboard the *Lusitania* after the torpedo struck. Immediately her bow dipped into the water and she listed to the starboard. Because of her faulty design, the list made the lifeboats difficult to launch. Those on the starboard side hung too far out away from the deck; those on the port side hung inboard. Captain Turner desperately attempted to supervise the launching of

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the boats from the navigation bridge, but soon the stern of the ship was looming well over his head. No. 2 lifeboat on the port side was filled with passengers when it went out of control and crashed into the bow end of the boat deck, smashing those persons in its way up against the bridge. The same fate occurred to lifeboats Nos. 4, 6, 8, and 10, creating a huge wreckage of crushed passengers and boats. The lifeboats on the starboard side fell into the water on top of each other or capsized in the turbulence caused by the liner's rapid sinking. Of her 48 lifeboats, only six ended up carrying survivors, and those soon became overloaded. The sea was filled with debris and dead and living bodies. In answer to the *Lusitania's* S O S, Admiral Coke, commander at Queenstown, ordered everything afloat to the rescue. This included the *Juno*, which was the first vessel to arrive in sight of the survivors. No one can read without outrage that before the *Juno* closed with the survivors, the Admiralty countermanded Coke's instructions and ordered it back to Queenstown. Almost another two hours elapsed before other vessels arrived on the scene.

Even more ominous than the actual sinking was the Admiralty coverup conducted through a Court of Inquiry under Lord Mersey. Captain Turner was selected as a scapegoat. Evidence was tailored to fit

the case, and that which didn't fit was ignored or suppressed. Lord Mersey, to his credit, refused to be a party to the framing of Captain Turner, whom he exonerated, but he did acquiesce in the blackout of facts concerning munitions and armaments on the *Lusitania*. Joseph Marichal, one survivor who refused to be silenced and insisted on testifying as to munitions aboard, was viciously slandered with lies about his background circulated by the government to the papers. The Wilson administration also cooperated in the Admiralty coverup. Gustav Stahl, a German operative testifying in the United States about the *Lusitania's* armaments, was immediately arrested on a charge of perjury for that very statement and held in prison without trial for three months. When he finally did stand trial the only evidence against him was a written deposition from Malone, collector of the Port of New York. Nevertheless, Stahl spent several years in jail, although in 1924 he was quietly awarded \$20,000 damages by the U.S. government. Dr. Ritter von Rettegh, a British-Austro-Hungarian double agent who provided some evidence concerning the possibility of the cargo containing gun cotton, was tried in camera and sent to Cleveland Penitentiary. His trial record is still classified secret by the Department of Justice.

The *Lusitania* incident stands revealed as a

clear case of government treachery. Its use to bring America nearer to war deserves close study. The only criticism I have of Simpson's book is that it is too short. Three hundred pages is simply not enough space to adequately treat all of the subjects which Simpson covers. As a result, he is frustratingly consistent in his refusal to stray from the presentation of data to interpretation, even when doing so would certainly make his narrative more lucid. It is too often left to the reader to draw conclusions and piece together evidence. Nevertheless, *The Lusitania* is a convincing and readable book, documented by massive research. It should be studied by all those interested in the relationship between war and the state. □

(Near press time REASON received a review copy of a new book on this subject, *The Lusitania Disaster* by Thomas A. Bailey and Paul B. Ryan [Macmillan, 1975, 383 pp., \$10.95]. Written in response to Simpson's book, it takes serious issue with many of the charges contained therein. A review of this new book will appear in a subsequent issue of REASON.—Ed.)

Jeffrey Rogers Hummel received his B.A. in history from Grove City College in 1971. After several years in the Army, he enrolled at the University of Texas at Austin, where he is doing graduate work in history. His review of *Operation Keelhaul* appeared in REASON'S November 1974 issue.

COMING NEXT MONTH

REASON'S March issue features an in-depth analysis of the politics of milk in today's mixed economy, demonstrating that, as far as politics is concerned, milk has something for everybody. Some of the more ominous new links between the Federal government and business are exposed in Charlotte Twight's "Congress Heads Toward Fascism," an excerpt from her just-published book *America's Emerging Fascist Economy*. Attorney Donald Feder, head of the National Association of Libertarian Lawyers, examines and demolishes liberal arguments for gun control. And economist/historian Gary North returns to entertain us with his "Midnight Money Analysis."

Also in the issue will be reviews of Percy Greaves' *Mises Made Easier* and Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* plus David Brudnoy's Viewpoint, John Pierce's Science Fiction column, and all of REASON'S regular features.

LUCIFER'S LEXICON

by L. A. Rollins

proverb, n. A saying that condenses the wisdom of experience into a half-truth. Half a truth is, I suppose, better than no truth at all. Following are some comparatively worthy proverbs: 1. Presents make the heart grow fonder. 2. People who live in glass houses shouldn't get stoned. 3. Two heads are better than none. 4. One man's meat is another man's sacred cow. 5. The carrot is mightier than the stick.

tender, adj. Readily yielding to blade or teeth: said of food, such as the tender hearts of Christian missionaries or the tender feet of the Donner party.

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