

# “Wipe out the Vons!” The Pietermaritzburg Citizens Vigilance Committee and the sinking of the *Lusitania*, May 1915

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## ***Abstract***

The Pietermaritzburg Citizens Vigilance Committee was an extra legal body which discovered disloyal persons of German extraction in the city following the riots caused by the German torpedoing of the British passenger liner *Lusitania* in May 1915. A public indignation meeting created the Committee and gave it a broad mandate to ferret out suspect enemy aliens. The European polity of Pietermaritzburg was essentially British; there were relatively few Germans, so the Committee worked quickly. It discovered no disloyalty, but it did discover much intimidation by so-called patriots, which it condemned. It is easy to see its work as an anti-German witch-hunt, but it also served as safety valve for passions inflamed by the *Lusitania* atrocity.

**Keywords:** Anti-German Demonstrations; Lusitania Riots; Great War; World War I; Pietermaritzburg; Vigilance Committee; FS Tatham; JG Maydon; PH Taylor.

## **Introduction**

In the spate of literature marking the centenary of the First World or Great War South Africa has had but a small part. This is probably because succeeding regimes have found little of interest or use in commemorating it.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, very, very little has been written about it since 1924. Perhaps the War and Society in Africa initiative at Stellenbosch in June of this year, a conference on “The Great War in Africa” will arouse greater interest, which may at least be sustained during the centennial years.<sup>2</sup>

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1 I van der Waag, *A military history of modern South Africa* (Cape Town and Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2014), p. 136.

2 The Institut des monde africain sponsored a conference, “The Great War in Africa: Economic, cultural and political consequences of World War I on African societies”, October, Dakar, ca. 2015.

During the last decade there has been a modest burgeoning of scholarly literature on South Africa in the war. B Nasson has written *Springboks on the Somme: South Africa in the Great War 1914-1918* (Johannesburg, Penguin, 2007) and *WWI and the People of South Africa* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2014). A Grundlingh and S Swart, *Radelose Rebelle? Dinamieke van die 1914-1915 Afrikaner Rebelle* (Pretoria, Protea, 2009). The role of the armed forces has been dealt with in a comprehensive chapter in I van der Waag, *A military history of modern South Africa* (Cape Town and Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2014). A Sampson focusses on a single theatre in *Britain, South Africa and the East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (London, Tauris, 2006). J Lambert and P Thompson have written extensively on English-speaking South Africans,<sup>3</sup> and T Dederig has written on anti-German agitation in the Union.<sup>4</sup> Plainly the main thrust of research has been in political and military research. Five of the eight sessions at the recent conference in Stellenbosch were in these fields. Only one was concerned with the South African home front.

During the Great War the urban centres of South Africa with large numbers of British residents – Johannesburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth Durban, and Pietermaritzburg – were wracked by riots in mid-May 1915, following receipt of news of the sinking of the British liner *Lusitania* by a German submarine off the coast of Ireland, with a loss of 1198 men, women and children, three quarters of the passengers and crew. Throughout the English-speaking world the popular reaction was one of horror and anger, and the media resounded with calls for revenge.<sup>5</sup> But how could the *Lusitania* be avenged? The atrocity was an impetus to volunteering for military service, but otherwise the avengers were frustrated, and rioting ensued, directed at alleged German and

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3 J Lambert, "South African British? Or dominion South Africans? The evolution of an identity in 1910s and 1920s", *South African Historical Journal*, 43(4), 2000, pp. 197-222; "Munitions factories... Turning out a constant flow of living material: White South African elite boys schools and First World War", *South African Historical Journal*, 51, 2004, pp. 67-85; "Britishness, South Africans and the First World War", P Buckner and R D Francis (eds.), *Rediscovering the British world* (Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2005), pp. 283-304; "Tell England, Ye who pass this monument: English-speaking South Africans, memory and war remembrances until the eve of the Second World War", *South African Historical Journal*, 66(4), 2014, pp. 677-698; P Thompson, "The Natal Home Front in the Great War (1914-1918)", *Historia*, 56(1), 2011, pp. 101-132; "Pietermaritzburg in the Great War: Corporate patriotism and civic sacrifice", *Historia*, 59(2), November 2014, pp. 171-193; "The outbreak of the Great War: How Pietermaritzburg reacted", *Natalia*, 44, 2014, pp. 9-18.

4 T Dederig, "'Avenge the *Lusitania*': The Anti-German riots in South Africa in 1915", *Immigrants & Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity and Diaspora*, 31(3), 2013, pp. 256-288.

5 For the riots and anti-German demonstrations in Britain see A Gregory, *The Last Great War: British society and the First World War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008); N Gullace, "Friends, aliens, and enemies: Fictive communities and the Lusitania riots", *Journal of Social History*, 39(1), 2005, pp. 347-367; P Panoyi, *The enemy in our midst: German civilian and combatant internees during the First World War* (New York, Manchester University Press, 2012); C Pennell, *A kingdom divided: Popular responses to the outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2012).

German-connected businesses, causing much destruction of property, and intimidating persons of German extraction by the way. Britain followed by the Dominions had closed enemy businesses and curtailed trade with the enemy, and interned or deported enemy nationals at the beginning of the war. There were enough loopholes to give the avengers a target, and now they demanded the government eliminate them completely. This was the case in South Africa, where overzealous supporters of the Allied cause regarded the government of General Louis Botha and his South African Party as too lenient in matters of internment and contraband. Immediately the riots were over, indignation meetings demanded draconian enforcement, with the clear implication more violence would follow unless the government responded, which the government did.<sup>6</sup>

In Pietermaritzburg the riots on 13 May 1915 caused damage amounting to £19 282. Eighteen putative German businesses were wrecked. No one was injured, but Germans living in the city were cowed, and internees on parole and a few others were taken into custody and put in the internment camp at Fort Napier, on the outskirts of town. It was apparent that the ringleaders had not done their planning well, for most of the premises affected actually belonged to Britishers (as press and public commonly identified those subjects, conscious of their British origin and stock) and “naturalised” Germans, i.e. ones who had become British subjects. Not that the mistake made much difference to the leaders and the mob they led: the impact was what counted. Pietermaritzburg’s European polity was English-speaking and thoroughly British in culture and outlook.<sup>7</sup>

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6 For the disturbances in South Africa see Union of South Africa, *Report of the Select Committee on Incendiarism* (Cape Town, Cape Times, Government Printer, 1916, S.C. 7-1916); T Dederling, “Avenge the Lusitania!”, LWF Grundlingh, “Die Engelsprekende Suid-Afrikaners se reaksie op die uitbreek van die Eerste Wêreldoorlog” (MA, UOVS, 1977); “n Aspek van die blanke Suid-Afrikaanse groepsverhoudinge tydens die Eerste Wêreld Oorlog: Anti-Duitse opstande, Mei 1915”, *South African Historical Journal*, 12, November 1980, pp. 65-92. The riots are also described in different contexts in GG Bruss, “The impact of the First World War on the German communities in Natal” (MA, UND, 1981); AJ van Wyk, “Politieke woelinge in Natal 1910-1915” (PhD, UOVS, 1977).

7 Narrative accounts of the demonstrations (or riots) 13-14 May in Pietermaritzburg appear in the local newspapers, viz Anon., “Anti-German demonstration in the city”, *Natal Witness*, 14 May; Anon., “City unrest”, 15 May 1915; Anon., “Night of riot”, *Times of Natal*, 14 May; Anon., “Truce declared”, 15 May 1915. Much more information is supplied by the evidence of M Barron, “The chief constable of Pietermaritzburg”, *Report of the Select Committee on Incendiarism*, pp. 313-332 (hereafter his evidence is cited simply by name and page); and the reports of acting Deputy Commissioner RS Godley, CID District Commandant WE Earle, and acting District Commandant WW Fulford, South African Police, Natal; Sgr Robert Byres, Borough Police, South African Police Deputy Commissioner Natal, SAP files, File No. 2, Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, KwaZulu-Natal Archives. All archival material cited in this article is in the KwaZulu-Natal Archives’ Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository.

The Union government sought in vain to bring leaders of the riots to justice, but in Pietermaritzburg, uniquely, citizens sought to bring subjects of the riots to justice. The public indignation meeting which established the “vigilance committee” to expose disloyalty to the British cause among residents of German extraction and to extirpate putative enemy aliens in their midst – “Wipe out the Vons”, as one of the railway men put it. This article is an account of the Pietermaritzburg Citizens Vigilance Committee. Despite the vindictiveness inherent in its formation, it proved to be anything but a kangaroo court. Indeed, its brief career was something of a contretemps; and ultimately it proved to be a good thing rather than a bad one.

### **Revenge by resolution**

The public indignation meeting was held on the evening of Saturday, 15 May 1915.<sup>8</sup>

The atmosphere in town was still tense. A second riot had been narrowly averted the evening before. There was a rumour during the day that there would be a Union-wide strike, and of two trainloads (or two motor cars) of men descending on the City. At the police station “there were telephone messages from all over the place that they were coming out”. Certain “Germans” were threatened, and the police put guards on their residences. The police paraded in the centre of town at six. Eleven detectives of the Criminal Investigation Department patrolled the streets, reporting on movements of the crowds which were now converging on the Town Hall for the meeting.<sup>9</sup>

The meeting was scheduled to begin at eight, but at half past seven there was standing room only, and a large number of people occupied the passage ways and remained outside the hall. There was an estimated 3 000 people – almost a third of the white population of Pietermaritzburg.<sup>10</sup> The Mayor thought it was the largest meeting ever held in the hall. The borough organist kept the crowd entertained with various airs, but “Tipperary” and “Rule Britannia”

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8 The main sources for the narrative of the meeting below are Anon., “Mass meeting”, *Natal Witness*, 17 May 1915; Anon., “Saturday’s mass meeting”, *Times of Natal*, 17 May 1915.

9 SAP 2, reports of RS Godley, p. 8; WW Fulford, p. 3; WE Earle, p. 4. M Barron, Evidence, *Report of the Select Committee on Incendiarism*, p. 325, who adds that telephone messages about further disturbances “kept the police in hot water for at least a fortnight”.

10 Europeans numbered 16 731 of the population of 34 881 in May 1918. Corporation of the city and Borough of Pietermaritzburg, *Corporation Year Book for the year ending July 31<sup>st</sup> 1918* (Pietermaritzburg, P Davis, 1918), p. 47.

were the ones most called for. There was a commotion when the sound of a big drum was heard, and about 300 railway men arrived. They had marched down Church Street (the main street) from the Railway Institute. They were greeted with loud cheers as they filed into the hall. There were no seats for their leaders, who pushed their way to the very front of the hall and sat down on the steps in front of the organ, overlooking the platform with rows of chairs reserved for the Mayor and Council and other worthies. They spread out a large Union Jack and set up a large painting of the *Lusitania*, with the words “Lest we forget” below it.

At ten to eight the Mayor led a procession of notables into the hall, and they took their seats on the platform. They included the Mayor, the Town Clerk, the Town Councillors along with the Chief Magistrate of the City, the Chief Justice of the Province, the Administrator’s secretary and son (an attorney), and three colonels of the old colonial militia.

The Mayor, Percy Taylor, opened the proceedings, and it was not an easy task to manage a volatile audience, many of whom were excited and vociferous. (The *Witness* reporter described the meeting as “deeply serious”, but also “very friendly and good-tempered”, with a note of “hilarity”.) He said that the demonstration had shown how they felt; and they had gone far enough. He read the requisition and said that resolutions would be presented. He read a telegram from the Minister of the Interior, with instructions that enemy subjects were to report to magistrates: all enemy subjects would be interned. “What about Von Gerard?” someone called. (Hans von Gerard was magistrate of the Umgeni divisional court.) All unnaturalised Germans would be interned, the Mayor replied. “Not good enough. Intern the lot”, the voice said; they had not gone far enough, others behind added.

The Mayor changed the subject. The demonstrations (no one called them riots) had damaged not only German but British property – the Deputy Mayor’s, for example – and in Durban the property of a large firm which would cost the British insurer £60 000. Whatever he said he was subjected to heckling and interruptions, and he changed tack abruptly. Were the actions on Thursday night British? No, they cried. He said he was pleased then that they were with him. Did they want to resort to German methods? No, they cried. He said that he was sure they would win the war, but they must do it with clean hands, with nothing to be ashamed of. He was completely sympathetic with the resolutions, and he did not believe any German should be employed in the public service.

Formal resolutions had been prepared in advance. John Maydon and Frederick Tatham, prominent men well known for their great patriotism, were also on the platform, and may have drafted them. Maydon and Tatham in turn spoke to the resolutions. Their speeches were florid and fiery, but measured, and went down very well, punctuated by “Hear, hear!”, and loud applause, rounded off with *For he’s a jolly good fellow!*<sup>11</sup>

Maydon read the resolutions. The first resolution denounced German atrocities and called on the authorities to intern or deport all Germans and to ban them from all business. The authorities could use their discretion with regard to colonial-born enemies, depending on their conduct. The second resolution called for stricter administration of internment camps. The third called for a stricter naturalization act. The fourth provided for the forwarding of the resolutions to the Prime Minister and Governor-General for transmission to the Imperial government. They were all passed unanimously.

Very different were the short, blunt resolutions proposed by the railway men’s representatives.

The first demanded that the government dismiss all German and Austrian subjects, whether naturalised South Africans or not. Mr Hutchinson, the mover, said that they should be put in places where they could do no harm. There were loud cheers, the motion was seconded, and carried unanimously.

The second resolution demanded that the Pietermaritzburg corporation cancel all licences issued to Germans and Austrians, naturalised or not, at once. Mr Hirst, the mover, jocularly added that railway men did not have the gift of oratory; they left that to their old friend Mr Tatham. He thanked the Mayor for keeping order after the riot, but then said they expected a timely answer from the government to their resolutions, and if they did not get it, well, they were under Martial Law, and under Martial Law you could do as liked. His remarks were accompanied by cheers and laughter. Maydon seconded the motion, and the resolution was carried by acclamation.

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11 M Barron, Evidence, *Report of the Select Committee on Incendiarism*, p. 325. Archives of the Town Clerk, Pietermaritzburg (hereafter 3/PMB), 3/1/94: “Letter Book, 19 November 1914-21 September 1915”, p. 537: Mayor to FS Tatham [15 May 1915]. Maydon was a member of parliament, and a staunch Unionist. Under the Colony he had been Minister for Railways and Harbours. Tatham was president of the Natal Branch of the League of Empire. He was a partner in the local law firm Tatham, Wilkes and Co., and had been instrumental in developing a residential area above the railway workshops (two roads were named Tatham and Wilkes). Both men were known as friends of the railway men.

The third resolution provided for the establishment of a Vigilance Committee in Pietermaritzburg, which would deal with any colonial-born enemy subject brought before it. It passed amidst cheers.

The fourth resolution demanded that German names of districts, railway stations, towns and even streets be replaced with more suitable ones. The mover, Mr [Tom] Howard, apologised for his hoarseness – he had shouted too much leading the riot on Thursday – and said that they should be replaced by good old English or Dutch names. German names should not be perpetuated in a true British colony. There was sedition in such places, and the only way to meet sedition was to take the gloves off. “Wipe out the Vons”, he added, amid much laughter.

Finally, a fifth resolution demanded that the Corporation dismiss all enemy subjects in its employ, starting “from the top”. The mover, JC Howard, said that the Town Council had let Germans take bread out of their mouths. Why not put a Britisher in the position of City Solicitor, instead of a German? He hoped that his resolution would be carried more than unanimously, by putting up two hands instead of one. There was much laughter. A man in the audience, Mr Horswell, asked to speak. He mounted the platform, and told them that the City Solicitor – AO Kufal, although he did not mention his name – had been born in Ireland of an English mother. What about his father, someone shouted. Did that make him a foreigner? Horswell returned to his seat. The resolution passed unanimously, with both hands.

The Mayor called for the playing of the Dead March from *Saul* in memory of the *Lusitania* victims, while a collection was taken for two businesses owned by citizens of neutral countries, whom the rioters had mistaken for Germans.

Almost as an afterthought the meeting passed a resolution congratulating General Botha on his capture of Windhuk, the capital of German South West Africa. Chief Justice Sir William Beaumont then thanked the Mayor for his tactful and resourceful handling of the meeting. He was cheered accordingly. The crowd sang the national anthem, and the meeting ended.

It was about 9.30, and the crowd dispersed in an orderly manner.<sup>12</sup> The railway men formed up and marched back to the Railway Institute, but before they got there they learnt that the police had arrested an engine driver and two bar maids who had been prominent in the riots and were now inciting a

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<sup>12</sup> Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, SAP 2, Reports of RS Godley, p. 8; WW Fulford, p. 3 for times.

crowd of 150-200 at a hotel in the centre of town. The police were informed that if the prisoners were not released they would march back into town and start a disturbance: they said that they had given their word at the public meeting that there would be no further disturbance or destruction of property and they had adhered to it, but they looked upon the arrests as a reflexion on their word. The police let the three go with a warning. At midnight all was quiet, and half an hour later the police returned to quarters.<sup>13</sup>

On Sunday the SAP were on stand-by at their barracks from 8 to 10.30 p.m.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of the railway men in the demonstrations is unique to Pietermaritzburg.<sup>15</sup> The large workshops and yards provided a disproportionate number of workers relative to other centres.<sup>16</sup> The railway workers were not regarded as a settled part of the community.<sup>17</sup> It was evident from their behaviour that they knew that they had power which the police could do little to check.<sup>18</sup> The Town Council and local clergy publicly deprecated the rampage and destruction, and the press, although apologetic, did likewise;<sup>19</sup> but the moral guardians had to rely on the police. Railway men had led the riot on Thursday, and they had spared the city more violence by their forbearance on Friday. The railway men agreed to give the government time to act, but they also made it clear that, if the government did not do what they wanted in that time, they would not hesitate to resort to violence again.<sup>20</sup>

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13 Anon., "Mass meeting", *Natal Witness*, 17 May 1915; SAP 2, Reports of RS Godley, pp. 8-9; WW Fulford, pp. 3-4.

14 Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, SAP 2, Reports of RS Godley, p. 9; WW Fulford, p. 4.

15 *Report of the Select Committee on Incendiarism*, p. xv.

16 For a description of Pietermaritzburg at this see the Pietermaritzburg section of *The Natal Directory for 1915* (Pietermaritzburg, P Davis, 1914); J Raybould, "Colonial capital to provincial centre, 1904-1912", pp. 90-93; C Torino, "Industrialisation 1838-1987", pp. 144-145, J Laband and R Haswell, (eds.), *Pietermaritzburg: 1838-1988. A new history of an African city* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press and Shuter & Shooter, 1988). Archives of the Magistrate, Pietermaritzburg, Correspondence 1/PMB 3/1/1/2/2, 1/6: Draft Report for year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 1915, Section C.

17 M Barron, Evidence, *Report of the Select Committee on Incendiarism*, p. 322.

18 M Barron, Evidence, *Report of the Select Committee on Incendiarism*, pp. 315, 316; SAP 2, Reports of RS Godley, pp. 4, 5; WW Fulford, pp. 3, 4, 5. See also *Report of the Select Committee on Incendiarism*, pp. xv, xxii.

19 PH Taylor and RS Godley, "Keep cool! Appeals to the public"; Anon., "A conference"; FS Natal et al, "A further appeal. From the city clergy", *Natal Witness*, 15 May 1915; PH Taylor and RS Godley, "An appeal", *Times of Natal*, 14 May; FS Natal et al, "For law and order: A further appeal", 15 May 1915; Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, SAP 2, RS Godley, Report, pp. 3-4.

20 See and cf Anon., "City unrest", *Natal Witness*, 15 May 1915; Anon., "Railway meeting", 18 May 1915; Anon., "Truce declared", *Times of Natal*, 15 May 1915; M Barron, Evidence, *Report of the Select Committee on Incendiarism*, p. 326; Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, SAP 2, Reports of RS Godley, pp. 6, 9, and WW Fulford, p. 4.



## **The Vigilance Committee<sup>21</sup>**

On Monday, 17 May the Mayor telegraphed the resolutions of the public meeting to the Prime Minister, and separately the one congratulating him on the occupation of Windhuk.<sup>22</sup> The Chief Magistrate registered enemy aliens still at large for internment.<sup>23</sup> That morning the Town Council held an emergency meeting.<sup>24</sup> Also present was a delegation consisting of Maydon, AE Hirst and GB Anderson, representing railway men, and Colonel Weighton. The Mayor reported that he had wired the resolutions to the government. A telegram from the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs and Public Works, Sir Thomas Watt, on the maintenance of law and order, was read, and the Mayor was instructed to reply. A message from the acting Chief Magistrate informed the meeting that a telegram had been received from the Minister of the Interior, instructing him to assure the public that enemy aliens would be interned as soon as arrangements were made for their accommodation.

The purpose of the meeting was to implement the resolutions of the public meeting. The formal resolutions having been directed and dispatched to the government, there was nothing further for the council to do in respect of them. This left the railway men's five resolutions. Two of these fell away. The one demanding the government dismiss enemy employees was superfluous, for such action had already taken place. The other, demanding the change of place names, was simply impracticable at the national level, impossible at the provincial level (the government lacking competence), and otiose at the local level, for Pietermaritzburg had no offensive German place names. The other three, namely, 1) the cancellation of licenses to Germans and Austrians, naturalised or not; 2) the dismissal of all enemy employees, starting "from the top"; and 3) the appointment appoint a Vigilance Committee to deal with enemy subjects brought before it, remained for the council's immediate action. Over the weekend those who had been prominent in the demonstration had compiled a list of known or suspect Germans in town

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21 This account of the Vigilance Committee's meetings and actions, unless otherwise indicated, is based on 3/PMB 9/3: "Minutes of Vigilance Committee – Re Anti German demonstrations".

22 Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3/PMB 7/1/94, pp. 545 and 550-555, Mayor to Prime Minister, 17 May 1915. "Congratulations to General Botha", *Times of Natal*, 17 May 1915.

23 Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 1/PMB 3/1/1/2/9: Interior to Chief Magistrate, telegrams, 18 May 1915, and Circular 42/15 (10/Z/24) to magistrates, 18 May 1915. Acting Chief Magistrate, Pietermaritzburg, "Notice. To all enemy subjects", *Natal Witness*, 17 May 1915. Anon., "General call by the magistrates" and "At the city office", *Times of Natal*, 17 May 1915.

24 The account of the Town Council's special meeting below is based on Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3/PMB 1/1/9: "Town Council Minutes 1911-1921", p. 408: Minutes of the Special Meeting 17 May 1915. Anon., "Council's action", and Anon., "Vigilance committee formed", *Natal Witness*, 18 May 1915.

with a view to taking legal action for their dismissal from public service, local bodies and businesses.<sup>25</sup>

The Vigilance Committee was to consist of four councillors, four representatives of the railway men, and four representatives of the public. The councillors were the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and Councillors WJ O'Brien and D Paton; the railway men's representatives were Anderson, Hirst, JC Howard, and EW Young; and the representatives of the public were Maydon, Tatham, DF Forsyth (chairman of the Chamber of Commerce) and Colonel Weighton. The first meeting of the Committee would take place that very evening.

The railway men apparently planned another procession, led by a band, on Monday evening, but Maydon intercepted them at the railway gates at five o'clock, and told the assembled men that it was not a good idea; it would bring out a crowd of the wrong sort of people. He told them what was being done in connexion with the public meeting's resolutions: the Town Council had held a special meeting that morning and discussed them, and decided that because of certain legal points, they would be referred to the Vigilance Committee. AE Hirst, who was also on the Vigilance Committee, concurred with Maydon, and GB Anderson counselled patience and control. The men decided unanimously to abandon the march, and dispersed with cheers for Maydon.<sup>26</sup> Even so, that evening the police were ready, as at the weekend, from six to ten.<sup>27</sup>

At eight o'clock Monday evening the Vigilance Committee held its first meeting in the Council Chamber of the Town Hall. The Mayor was elected to the chair. The Town Clerk was secretary. The quorum was fixed at seven. The Committee decided that the press should be admitted to the first part of the meeting, when matters of public importance were discussed, but not the remainder of it, when enquiries would be made and confidential business conducted. The secretary produced a draft programme, to which the Committee agreed, providing:<sup>28</sup>

- That all persons of German, Austrian or Turkish descent for the past two generations be invited by advertisement to submit a statement to the secretary

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25 Anon., "After the Riots", *Natal Witness*, 18 May 1915.

26 Anon., "Railway Meeting", *Natal Witness*, 18 May 1915.

27 Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, SAP 2, Reports of RS Godley, p. 9 and WW Fulford, p. 4.

28 Anon., "Vigilance Committee", *Natal Witness*, 18 May 1915 paraphrased in Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 2 PMB 9/3: Minutes of the Vigilance Committee, 17 May 1915, p. 1.

giving the full particulars of their antecedents, including those in Government and municipal employment. After enquiry by personal examination or otherwise the committee, if satisfied, to issue a certificate that it is satisfied with the bona fides of the applicant.

- The decision of the Committee of the bona fides of the applicants to be final.

The first item the Committee considered was the cancellation of all licences to Germans and Austrians, naturalised or not. The Town Clerk had ordered the corporation licensing officer to prepare a list of such licensees that morning.<sup>29</sup> The question arose whether indeed the Committee had the power to exclude aliens. After all the Committee was not a recognised official body; it was the creation of a public meeting.<sup>30</sup> Tatham resolved the question by moving:<sup>31</sup>

That as it appears that existing trading licences cannot be legally cancelled, this Committee is of opinion that so far as the law allows, enemy subjects should be prevented from trading.

That this Committee affirms the principle that with a view to supporting British subjects, it should be the policy of the Union to restrict trading facilities to British subjects.

After more wrangling the Committee passed the resolutions separately, and did not return to the matter of trade again. (There is no record of the Town Clerk's reporting whether or not any Germans or Austrian actually had licences.)

The Mayor offered a letter he had received from one WH Whittaker, which drew the committee's attention to a statement made by someone at the public meeting that enemy subjects were persecuting naturalised Germans. Whittaker hoped that the meeting's resolutions would not be made to apply to them. The Committee could not recollect the statement, and requested Whittaker furnish details.<sup>32</sup>

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29 Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3/PMB 3/1/94, p. 549: Town Clerk to Licensing Officer, 17 May 1915. Probably the information was to hand, for two months earlier the chief magistrate had furnished a report on enemy firms (alien and naturalised) to the commissioner for enemy subjects (1/PMB 3/1/1/2/9: 267/14, CM to CES, 6 Mar. 1915); the magistrate gave some names but no addresses, but presumably he had complete information, more than likely supplied by the local authority.

30 See the comment of the acting chief magistrate to the secretary for the interior 25 May 1915 (Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 1/PMB 3/1/1/2/9).

31 Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3 PMB 9/3: Minutes of the Vigilance Committee, 17 May 1915, p. 2.

32 Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3/PMB 1/1/94, p. 555: Town Clerk to WH Whittaker, 18 May 1915. The newspaper reports of the meeting contain no statement of the sort.

The Committee proceeded “in camera”. The Mayor explained that a Mr Schriever was waiting outside the chamber to be interviewed. He was admitted, and told the Committee that a railway employee named Dolphin had informed him that his name was on “the list” and his house was to be destroyed. He asked for protection. His father had been naturalised, and he himself was English-speaking and British in sentiment. The Committee accepted his bona fides. The railway men’s representatives denied that there was a list. They assured Schriever that as far as the railway community was concerned he need fear no trouble.

The Committee took up the railway men’s resolution, that the corporation dismiss all enemy subjects in its employ, starting “from the top”. The Town Clerk reported on city employees of German and Austrian and Turkish descent, and the Committee resolved that AO Kufal, the City Solicitor, and David Nordwald and AE Behrens of the Electric Light Department be invited to attend the next meeting. In addition, certain railways employees of German descent, who were reported to have been suspended, were also invited to attend.

Maydon asked the secretary to retain the money collected at the public meeting, for he had heard disquieting reports about the Swiss baker WA Shinke and would make enquiries about him and report.

Finally, perhaps reflecting on and making inferences from the above matters, the Committee passed another resolution:<sup>33</sup>

That persons in possession of information as to enemy subjects whose cases should be investigated by the Committee be requested to furnish the Committee with such information either personally or in writing. Anonymous communications will not be noticed.

On Tuesday evening the Committee began by approving the form of a certificate of loyalty. Certificates would be issued to persons whom it examined with whose bona fides it was satisfied. The matter of how to proceed with the examinations was not so easy. AE Hirst, one of the railway men, moved:<sup>34</sup>

That due notice be given of anyone who is to be examined by the committee, and an invitation extended to those who desire to give evidence for or against the party to be examined.

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33 3/PMB 9/3: Minutes of the Vigilance Committee, 17 May 1915, p. 4.

34 3/PMB 9/3: Minutes of the Vigilance Committee, 18 May 1915, p. 1.

Councillor Paton protested that Hirst's motion was unfair. It would encourage people to bring up gossip going around town. (Paton was the only councillor who had tried to stop rioters on Thursday.)<sup>35</sup> Chamber chairman Forsyth said that if they were not satisfied with a person's explanation they could make further inquiries. Deputy Mayor Sanders said that the committee, which was self-constituted, could not infringe the law, even if the public acquiesced. Tatham then pointed out that the publication of a person's name without his consent might constitute a libel against his bona fides, and the members of the Committee severally might find themselves with actions for damages! He moved.<sup>36</sup>

That in cases where the Committee desires further information about any particular person, whose case is under consideration, the person concerned should be asked for his consent to this Committee publicly advertising for anyone who desires to say anything to appear before the Committee for the purpose.

Hirst withdrew his motion, and Tatham's was carried unanimously.

Paton referred to the tittle-tattle going on over the telephone about certain residents' parentage. There was a good deal of intimidation going on, both by phone and by anonymous letters: it should be stopped. Councillor O'Brien agreed. The press was asked to publish a request for people to stop, at least until the Committee finished their business. Anderson protested that Paton's remarks should not be directed at railway men; most of them worked in localities where they could not get to a telephone. Paton replied he was not making insinuations against them. There was a momentary slack in the discussion, and the Mayor asked the press to leave.

### **Certification of loyalty<sup>37</sup>**

From this point on the Vigilance Committee conducted its business "in camera", and matters will be treated topically rather than chronologically.

The object of the Vigilance Committee was to determine the bona fides of "enemy subjects" in terms of the resolutions passed at the public meeting. Evidently "bona fides" meant an unfeigned and manifest loyalty to the Allied

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<sup>35</sup> Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, SAP 2, RS Godley, Report, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3/PMB 9/3" Minutes of the Vigilance Committee, 18 May 1915, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> From this point Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3/PMB 9/3 contains no more press cuttings. The private business of the Committee is related concisely (and drily) in the typescript minutes of the Town Clerk.

cause. The resolutions did not define “enemy subject”, but the meaning was fairly obvious: principally immigrants, including those who had been “naturalised” as British (or Union) citizens by application and oath, and their colonial-born offspring. Several leaders and letters in the press were of the once-a-German-always-a-German type, implying no such German’s loyalty could be trusted.<sup>38</sup>

All enemy nationals had been interned by the government at the beginning of the war. Those subsequently paroled or otherwise spared incarceration were now obliged to register with local magistrates on Monday 17 May and were interned again. The district, which included the borough, was hardly teeming with enemy nationals – the magistrate registered thirteen, nine of whom had been on parole.<sup>39</sup>

The committee’s procedure was clear enough. A public notice invited those “naturalised” (or not) Germans, Austrians and Turks to apply to the committee, which would interview them. With the consent of the individual concerned another notice would invite presentation of evidence at a second interview, and then the Committee would decide on the man’s bona fides and issue (and publish) a certificate of loyalty.

Not everyone who was suspected of being disloyal appeared before the committee. Some Individuals and businesses simply advertised their loyalty by letter or notice in the press and considered that sufficient.<sup>40</sup> Most of those whose property had been attacked by rioters did appear before the committee, for, as Tatham pointed out, their disloyalty might be inferred from the fact of attack. There were two cases where buyers of businesses which had been attacked sought certificates of loyalty as a kind of insurance.<sup>41</sup>

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38 An Austrian in common parlance was a subject of the Dual Monarchy, Austria-Hungary. None was identified in Pietermaritzburg.

39 See the list in Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 1/PMB 3/1/1/2/9: Acting Chief Magistrate to commandant SAP, 22 May 1915. Twenty-one persons had been interned in September 1914, of whom the magistrate recommended that only two be detained and seventeen paroled (Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 267/1914: ACM to Secretary for Defence, 28 September 1914). Many who were reinterned were reparaoled (Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 147/17: CM to CES 2 March 1917).

40 Compare L Ludwig, “German woman disgusted”, *Natal Witness*, 14 May; EW Venner, “No room for hate”, 17 May; B Henrichs, “Let’em all come”, 19 May, and several “Disclaimers”, 17-19 May 1915; Anon., “Rumours denied”; L Ludwig, “Regret and disgust”, *Times of Natal*, 14 May; Anon., “Amusing features of the riots”; AJ Voller, “Not a German”, 17 May 1915.

41 The practice of certification of businesses was something the Committee seems to have wished to avoid, as Tatham indicated when he moved for suspension. Such certification was commonplace in Johannesburg and other centres – cf the *Report of the Select Committee on Incendiarism*, p. xi and particularly the evidence of H Beamish in pp. 287-313 passim. T Dederling, “Avenge the *Lusitania*”, pp. 262-263, refers to a network of boycott organisations in other centres as “vigilante committees”. He does not elaborate, nor does he mention the Pietermaritzburg Vigilance Committee which was not a boycott organisation at all.

The resolution for purging the corporation instructed the Committee to start “from the top” yielded just three alleged “enemy subjects”. Foremost was AO Kufal, the City Solicitor. The other two were AE Behrens and David Nordwald of the Electric Light department. They produced papers showing that they were indeed British subjects; Kufal also put letters in the press. The fathers of all three had been naturalised, and their mothers were British. Kufal and Nordwald had been born in the United Kingdom, Behrens in Durban. They described themselves and their families as English in culture and outlook. They emphatically supported Britain. No one came forward to challenge them, and the Committee readily issued certificates to them.

There were two officials in government service who appeared before the Committee – Henry Koch, retiring Master of the Natal division of the Supreme Court, and Hans von Gerard, a district magistrate. The Committee had no competence whatever in respect of their employment, but both had been threatened anonymously, and so their application was politic. Koch’s parents were German, but he had been born in Holland, and they were all naturalised. Von Gerard was Bavarian, had come to Natal as an orphan, and was naturalised. The Committee certified Koch, and would have Von Gerard, but it ceased to operate before he could be interviewed a second time.

Then there were six railway men, all young colonial-born Germans. In the heat of the moment fellow workers had demanded their removal, and they were suspended at the time of the riots.<sup>42</sup> Passions had cooled somewhat and District Loco[motive] Foreman McCallum appeared before the Committee and asked for certificates so that they could be reinstated. The railway men’s representatives on the Committee fully concurred, and the following day the six men were interviewed and then issued certificates.

Five men whose businesses had been attacked by rioters applied – DJ and J Timm (general goods and grocery merchants), JC Baumann (baker), RE Niesewand (optician), and HR Schwake (jeweller). All were naturalised and recognised as men of standing in the community. The Timm brothers had five stores, all of which had been wrecked, the damage being estimated at over £3 000. The Timms also published letters affirming their loyalty in the

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<sup>42</sup> Anon., “Railway men act”, *Natal Witness*, 13 May 1915. A railway men’s petition demanding removal of Germans had been circulated nationwide and was signed in Pietermaritzburg on 12 May.

press. There was a surge of sympathy for their plight.<sup>43</sup> No one challenged the applicants, and all were issued certificates.

Eleven other persons were interviewed and issued with certificates (except Schriever, who appeared before the form was approved). They were all naturalised and evidently anglicised. One, EN von Berg (the only other “Von” found), a painter by trade, had had his house threatened and was in danger of losing business because of the anti-German boycott. Two others (K or E Kregeloh and J Wasner) had the misfortune of fathers not being naturalised; the Committee supported their cases, but had to refer them to the magistrate.<sup>44</sup>

Then there was Clr EG Mendenhall, who sought and got a certificate after his wife received an anonymous letter: his family were suspected of being German Jews, and they should “prove their bona fides as British subjects in order to insure both ‘business and private property’ from destruction”.

In addition to the above there were the two applications involving properties. HL Bartholomai, an Austrian national of Italian descent, had one of the better jewellery stores in Pietermaritzburg until the rioters gutted it. Bartholomai had died before the war, and the store had been managed by Britishers on behalf of his widow and children. The executor of Bartholomai’s estate proposed to continue the business, but under the name Forsyth and Company; a certificate would assure its bona fides. HB Brown was negotiating to buy the Timms’ store near the railway yards; the Timms were prepared to sell, but Brown thought a certificate would help restore business. A railway man allowed “it would clear the air”. The Committee obliged both applicants.

There were several cases where the Committee wished to have action taken against persons whom they suspected of being pro-German. The Committee questioned the loyalty of Messrs Reiche and Schroenn, who lived in the district, and referred their cases to the magistrate, who replied that he could take no legal action because they were naturalised. Similarly, that of a Mr Ehlers at Mooi River, a blacksmith who taught at a farm school and allegedly made offensive remarks, was referred to the magistrate of that district. More susceptible of examination was Mrs Wearner, whose husband was interned

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43 DJ and Joseph Timm, “Timm brothers”, notices in *Natal Witness* and *Times of Natal*, 15 May 1915; FL Shuter, “Loyal and patriotic”; Anon., “Rumours denied”, *Times of Natal*, 14 May; DJ Timm, “Mr Timm’s family”, *Natal Witness*, 15 May 1915.

44 See Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 1/PMB 3/1/1/2/9, E.S. 70/3025/14: CES to ACM, 4 June 1915; 3/PMB 3/1/94, p. 595: Town Clerk to ACM, 27 May 1915.



at Fort Napier. She ran the Hanover House boarding hotel in the main street. The police had intervened three times during the riot to prevent its being burnt as a den of German sympathisers. She was accused of all sorts of offensive remarks, and neighbours were willing to testify, but she did not appear; instead the owner of the building, Frank Harris, did, and asked for protection because it had been threatened. The Committee told him to consult his legal adviser.

In three cases time ran out for the committee. Two railway men accused JWG Schulze, station master at the Victoria station in the city, of making remarks about the sinking of the *Lusitania* (“they had been warned”) and about an Indian passenger, for whom he stopped a train to board (“some day he would be a British officer”); they found the remarks offensive; they said that there were the four other witnesses, but before Schulze and the witnesses could be got together for a hearing the Committee rose, and the matter was left to the general manager of railways. A certain Mr Asshton-Smith complained to the Committee of offensive remarks by Mr Sutcliff, a master at Maritzburg College, whom the Committee decided to interview in the presence of the headmaster, but the Committee adjourned leaving further action to “the proper authority”.

Finally there was the case of WA Shinke, the Swiss whose bakery had been burnt by the rioters. At the public meeting a collection had been taken to compensate the owners of injured “neutral” businesses. Shinke was the principal one, and eventually he was paid a little over £35 – in August 1916. The reason for the delay was that Maydon claimed to have evidence that he was pro-German, but the Committee adjourned before Shinke could be given a hearing, and when the Town Clerk consulted members severally afterwards, Maydon, Forsyth and Weighton refused to budge. After a year the Town Clerk made the payment, presumably with the approval of council.<sup>45</sup>

### **Protection of victims**

So far we have seen the Vigilance Committee sorting out “enemy subjects”. It probably did not expect to extend protection to victims of the anti-German hysteria which it reflected. As we have seen, the Committee received requests

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<sup>45</sup> See the Town Clerk’s correspondence with Neilson and Shinke (14 August-5 September 1916), Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3/PMB 3/1/96, pp. 145, 217, 218, 249.

for protection against anonymous threats. Nine persons reported that their houses had been threatened with burning – five (Mendenhall, Schriever, Schulze, Timm, Von Berg and Von Gerard) for having a German connexion, principally probably their name, and four (“British lady”, Harris, Shuter, Zank) for sheltering German women and children. The Committee asked the informants to obtain further information and referred letters to the Criminal Investigation Department of the South African Police.

In three cases railway men were implicated. Mr Schriever reported that the railway man Dolphin had told him his house was on a list of ones to be attacked. There were reports of lists being used in the Johannesburg riots, and, of course, a list suggested a conspiracy and a programme. Dolphin was brought before the Committee the following day and interrogated. He was not a satisfactory witness. He denied making a statement or knowing of a list. He was cross-examined. He insisted he had not seen a list. He had heard someone say that Schulze’s house was marked and had passed on the remark. In the second case Clr Paton referred to anonymous threatening telephone calls in such a way that provoked railway men’s representative Anderson to exonerate railway men on the grounds their work hardly allowed them make telephone calls. Third was the case of FL Shuter, who had defended the Timms in the press and had sheltered two of the Timm children; he had his house threatened. The Committee asked him to try to find out the sources of the threats. What he found out is not recorded, but he did tell the Committee that he was satisfied with the railway men’s representatives’ promise that he would suffer no harm at the hands of railway men.

Anonymous threats by letter and telephone, as reported by Paton, did move the Committee to issue a deprecating statement in the press. An anonymous letter (“British first and always” in the *Times of Natal*) in the press, attacking the Kochs, angered the committee, which instructed the editor to inform the writer to substantiate his statement in person or in writing. (The writer appears not to have done so.) The Committee resolved:<sup>46</sup>

This Committee expresses its deliberate opinion that the publication in the press of anonymous communications making serious suggestions against individuals is calculated to cause trouble, and is not in accordance with the British idea of fair play; and that if the writers of such letters have information as to the anti-British sentiments of certain individuals, they should take the manly course of reporting to the authorities or to this committee.

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<sup>46</sup> Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3/PMB 9/3: Minutes of the Vigilance Committee, 19 May 1915, p. 1.

Jobs were also at stake. The painter EN von Berg had been forced to leave his store, had lost one contract and seemed about to lose another, when he appealed to the committee. HB Krawehel, whose name was actually French, was suspended by Parker Wood and Company because of an anonymous letter; he appealed to the Committee and got a certificate (and presumably secured his job). WB Brown and Company informed the Committee that it had dismissed two young ladies for being of German or Austrian descent, but following an interview with the Railway Committee<sup>47</sup> it asked them to return. They did not.

The Committee also had to consider cases of distress. The government accorded German women and children refugee status and gave them a small subsistence allowance,<sup>48</sup> and the colonial- born German community offered some accommodation, but its capacity was limited. There were relatively few cases of hardship in Pietermaritzburg, but several were brought to the Vigilance Committee's attention.

The first instance brought to the committee's attention (by whom is not recorded) concerned a German lady and her three children. Her husband had been interned, and she had found lodging in a house belonging to "a British lady", who was now threatened with having her house burnt if she did not get rid of them. The German lady had gone to Fort Napier, where previously she had found shelter, but was told the fort was full, and perforce she returned to the British lady. The Committee left it to the Mayor to approach the government with a view to providing accommodation in such cases.

The second instance was brought to the committee's attention by the Mayor. He had learnt that a number of girls of German extraction from country districts, who had been employed as servants and nurses as well as in other capacities, were stranded in town after their employers had dismissed them. He had wired the Minister of the Interior to give them free railway passes to return to their homes. The department advised him that, if neither they nor their parents had the funds, the Chief Magistrate might issue them second-class railway warrants.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> It is not clear what this body was.

<sup>48</sup> See Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 1/PMB 3/1/1/2/9, 5/Z/33: Acting Under Secretary Interior to ACM, 1 June 1915.

<sup>49</sup> See Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3/PMB 3/1/94, 564: Mayor to Minister of the Interior [n.d.]. The same day the minister replied to the Mayor he authorised the chief magistrate on the 20<sup>th</sup> to do so (1/PMB 3/1/1/2/9, D50: Min Int to ACM, 20 May 1915).

Meanwhile the Committee resolved that representations should be made to the Chief Magistrate to the effect that wives and families of internees “should be distributed, as far as possible among their own people at New Germany, New Hanover, etc., and they should be removed from communities where the population was purely British in order to save irritation, and for the sake of themselves”.<sup>50</sup>

The third instance was that of another German lady whose husband was interned; apparently she had no children. Mr and Mrs Zank, naturalised Germans, sheltered her, and their house was threatened because they did so. The Committee informed Zank that “it considered it inadvisable for his own sake, that the lady should continue to reside in his house”.

## **Suspension**

At the Thursday evening meeting disappointment was expressed that the government had not replied to the formal resolutions of the public meeting. The Committee instructed the Mayor to inform the government that its failure was causing considerable unrest and to ask for a reply forthwith. He sent a telegram immediately.<sup>51</sup>

After a week the Vigilance Committee had sorted out “enemy subjects” in corporation employment, licensed to trade, and exposed as targets by the riot. It found very few, and as an ad hoc body without official recognition, it could take no action against them. It had also discovered that any number of putative patriots had indulged anonymously in intimidation and endangered the welfare of innocents, and against them it was powerless. Public opinion, as reflected in the press, also showed growing contrition at the excesses of and sympathy for the victims of the riots.

The last meeting of the Committee was on Monday, 25 May. Tatham said that when the Committee was appointed he was under the impression that its

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50 Evidently representation was made to the Chief Magistrate, who pursued the matter without satisfactory result. See Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 1/PMB 3/1/1/2/9, 267/1915: ACM to Sec Int, 25 May; 5/Z/33: Actg. Under Sec. Int. to ACM, 25 May; 267/1915 and 5/Z/33: ACM to Sec Int, 12 June 1915. The magistrate informed the commandant SAP that nine families would be homeless at the end of June if relief could not be provided (ACM to Cdt, 8 June 1915).

51 See Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3/PMB 3/1/94., p. 576: Town Clerk to Private Secretary, Governor General, 21 May 1915.

function would be to enquire into the cases of those against whom charges were made at the public meeting, against corporation officials and “inferentially” against those whose property had been destroyed in the riot. The Committee had dealt with those cases. It had also interviewed many people who, because they had German names, asked for certificates of character. If the Committee were to continue to deal with such applications, then “it would sit for all time”. It was time to stop. They must decide either to dissolve the Committee or to suspend its meetings, by which he meant until such time as definite charges were brought forward against individuals. He moved:<sup>52</sup>

That this Committee suspend its activities, and that His Worship the Mayor convene a meeting or meetings when necessary.

Anderson seconded the motion, although with some reservations.

Maydon said that he supported suspension. The Committee might still have a useful career, but in the cases now coming before it “it was likely to do harm rather than good”. It was impossible to give protection to witnesses and so the Committee was unable to gather evidence.<sup>53</sup>

The resolution was carried unanimously.

The Committee in private disposed of the pending cases of Schulze and Sutcliffe, referring them to other authorities, and seems tacitly to have abandoned hearings scheduled for Shinke and Von Gerard. Then it rose, and never met again.

## **Conclusion**

This article has traced the career and analysed the work of the Pietermaritzburg Citizens Vigilance Committee, and it sets Pietermaritzburg apart as *sui generis* among the centres affected by anti-German violence following the *Lusitania* sinking. The Committee was the creation of a resolution proposed by representatives of railway men in the city at an excited public meeting, just

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<sup>52</sup> Pietermaritzburg Archive, KZN, 3/PMB 9/3: Minutes of the Vigilance Committee, 25 May 1915, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Anon., “Vigilance Committee. The final sitting”, *Natal Witness*, 26 May 1915. Maydon’s and Anderson’s recorded remarks are ambiguous and suggestive. Anderson’s also has an opacity owing to several obscure references: “He said he did not know if the public appreciated the value of the work done during the recent disturbances by Maydon, Tatham, and the Mayor. The railway men did not consider the remedy suggested by the Home Parliament sufficiently swift moving, and the result of a conference was that a different procedure was laid down and decided at the public meeting”.

two days after a riot protesting the sinking of the *Lusitania*. The Committee was an extralegal body whose mission, defined by other resolutions, was to extirpate a disloyal element in the local “German” community. “Wipe out the Vons,” as railway man Tom Howard said.

It was a bad thing. Ill-conceived and hastily formed, it was mandated to conduct a witch hunt. Yet there no witches to hunt. The Committee found out quickly that the disloyal element was the figment of an inflamed imagination. No “Von” was found to wipe out. It discovered no traitors, but it did discover a current of intimidation among the city’s overzealous patriots. Its investigation of treason was a contretemps, and the railway men came out particularly badly. As soon as possible the Committee was terminated.

That is one view. Another is that the Committee served as a safety valve for the hysterical passions that created it. It was a good thing then. It comprised equal numbers of railway men, leading citizens, and town councillors, who had to execute a harsh mandate in a just manner, difficult to do when public feelings still ran high.

Audaciously conceived in public, the Committee proved judicious *in camera*. While it sat, violence ceased. The elite bourgeois members straightaway got the upper hand of the railway men. There was a consciousness of British fair play, as opposed to the Huns’ way of doing things. For all its bias (which was intense) the Committee evinced little malice towards those brought before it. It did its job rather well, and revealed the unexpected truth about putative treason. Having done so, there was no reason to prolong its career.