
Prager Lynch Murder Trial Ends in Miscarriage of Justice

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The Prager lynching in Collinsville, Ill., is a closed chapter.

Justice has been defeated. Democracy was put on trial in the great state of Illinois and lost its case; democracy has been condemned, convicted, and sentenced.

Mob rule, lynch law, defiance of law, order, and justice have been sanctioned.

The jury which tried 11 residents of Collinsville, Ill., in Circuit Judge Bernreuter's court at Edwardsville for the lynching of Robert Paul Prager, alleged German spy, returned a verdict of not guilty after deliberating 39 minutes.

When the verdict was read there was a wild demonstration in the courtroom which the authorities could not halt. Hats were thrown into the air and the spectators ran to the front of the courtroom cheering the defendants, shaking their hands, and patting them on the back.

Yes, patting them on the back.

Attorney for Defense Disgraces Great State of Abraham Lincoln.

Charging that the state had not indicted and brought to trial the actual lynchers of Prager, James M. Bandy, chief counsel for the 11 men, asked

the jury to acquit the defendants.

"The men who hanged Prager were good, loyal citizens, men of middle age, and not the boys on trial here," said Bandy in his argument.

"The men who hanged Prager were men who feared for their lives in the mines.

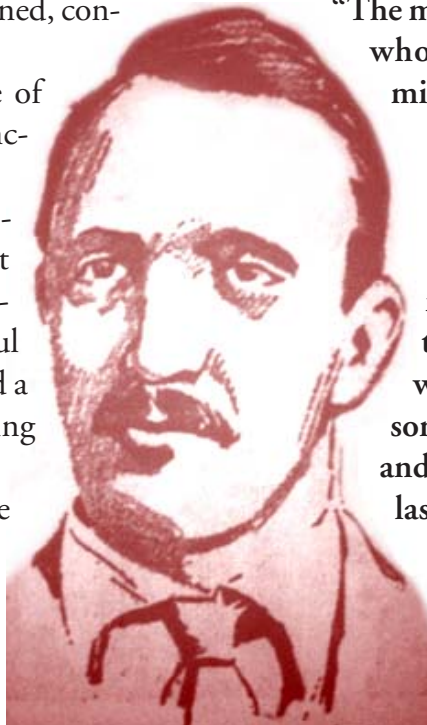
"Loyalty should have been an issue in this trial. We could have justified the action of the patriotic men of Collinsville, and not the court prevented the introduction of testimony to show what inspired the people of Madison County on the night of April 4 and the early morning of April 5, last.

"We wanted to show that the men who did the hanging were good, patriotic American citizens. But this man Prager was not loyal. He was a pro-Ger-

man and the people not only of Madison County know it, but the people in other places where this man moved about unmolested."

D.S. Williamson, also of counsel for the defense, told the jury the law of today was enacted when the United States was at peace, and its framers had no idea this country would be drawn into a world conflict.

He dramatically walked about in front of the jurymen and pointed his finger at them.



“Suppose you were in Collinsville on the night of April 4, and you heard the cry, ‘We’ve caught a German spy!’ Would you have sneered at the idea? Would you have passed it from your memory without a second thought?”

“They tell you that because of the hanging of Prager the Kaiser will seek revenge. There is nothing in the way of brutality the Kaiser has not done and the Prager case will have no bearing on the Kaiser in his future acts.”

Williamson said he found nothing in the law that gave an enemy alien standing in the courts of America, and said that there are persons who cover their disloyalty under the guise of giving to the Red Cross and that if the men on trial are convicted these persons will find secret satisfaction.

“There isn’t a man on trial here that wouldn’t shoulder a gun and follow the flag into battle, even to give up his own life for America,” said Williamson. “If you punish these men for gathering at City Hall your verdict will stamp you as being opposed to men who are loyal, and in favor of disloyalty. Some of these men may have made mistakes, but mistakes are human. I ask that the man on the jury who has made no mistakes in his life cast the first ballot for the guilt of the defendants.”

Assistant Attorney General Middlekauff, in closing the argument for the state, said if the jury acquitted the defendants and approved the lynching of enemy aliens in Collinsville, there would be outbreaks against alien enemies in all section. He

said the jury would not be aiding the state in getting revenge, and quoted from the Bible that the Lord only was entitled to vengeance.

He said the Collinsville lynching was on an equal with the Lovejoy massacre, the Chicago Haymarket riot, and the East St. Louis race riots. He said the defendants should have reported Prager and permitted the courts to take care of him.

“If Prager was a pro-German he is where he belongs — in his grave,” said Middlekauff. “He ought to be dead, but the courts should have passed sentence. To kill in battle is not murder, but to kill an alien enemy under circumstances like those which Prager was killed is murder. If the defendants are found not guilty other lynchings may follow.”

State’s Attorney Streuber told the jury the case was one of the most important ever tried in Madison County, and it was being watched with interest throughout the United States. He spoke 20 minutes on the subject of loyalty.

“No man can be a loyal American and say he stands for mob law, and corrective measures are not to be administered by mobs,” said Streuber. “The man who justifies a mob does not love his country.

“Germany’s lawlessness was the cause of the present war, and when Prager was hanged the happiest man in the world was the Kaiser. The men who suffered most were President Wilson and Governor Lowden of Illinois, Streuber said.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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