DEUSTER AS A DEMOCRATIC DISSENTER DURING THE CIVIL WAR: A CASE STUDY OF A COPPERHEAD*

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Wisconsin made a notable contribution to the winning of the Civil War. No Northern State, in proportion to population, had a better record in furnishing soldiers. No state’s soldierly received more acclaim for courage and heroism. Three Wisconsin regiments helped to give the famous Iron Brigade its enviable reputation, and General William T. Sherman one time said that he always considered a Wisconsin regiment “equal to an ordinary brigade.” Wisconsin’s five Civil War governors, all Republicans, gave full support to the war effort. Such newspapers as the Milwaukee Sentinel, the Racine Advocate, and the (Madison) Wisconsin State Journal consistently endorsed all the war measures of the Lincoln administration. Most of the state’s citizens were patriots. Yet, on the other hand, Wisconsin also furnished some well-known critics of Abraham Lincoln and Civil War policy. Marcus Mills (“Brick”) Pomeroy of the La Crosse Democrat brazenly opposed most measures of the Lincoln administration and had the gall to label Lincoln “a flat-boat tyrant”—even hoping for the president’s assassination. Edward G. Ryan, destined to become Wisconsin’s most famous jurist, wrote a scholarly critique of Civil War policy and instructed the Democracy to oppose the changes which the conflict was imposing upon the country. Moses M. Strong of Mineral Point frequently spoke against some of President Lincoln’s war measures and worked hard to put a Democratic president in the White House in 1864. George H. Paul of the Milwaukee News, Flavius J. Mills of the Sheboygan Journal, and Stephen D. (“Pump”) Carpenter of the (Madison) Wisconsin Patriot wrote editorials critical of Lincoln and the war. No Wisconsin Democrat, however, developed as solid an anti-war bloc as Peter V. Deuster, the prominent politi-

* Several years ago the author did a very brief and semi-popular article entitled "Peter V. Deuster, the See-Bote, and the Civil War" for the Historical Messenger (of the Milwaukee County Historical Society), XVI (December, 1960), pp. 2–6. That cursory study has served as a springboard for this article.
cian who used the (Milwaukee) See-Bote as an outlet for his anti-Lincoln and anti-war views.\(^1\)

By 1860 Peter Victor Deuster served as chief spokesman for the thousands of German Catholics who lived in southeastern Wisconsin. His rise to leadership was no accident—rather it was the result of his ability, experience, and audacity. He had much in common with the thousands of German Catholics who found their way to Wisconsin in the 1840's and 1850's. He was born near Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen) in Westphalia on February 18, 1831. As a lad of sixteen he accompanied his parents from the Rhineland to Milwaukee, just as Wisconsin Territory was preparing for statehood. After spending a year with his parents on a farm near Milwaukee, young Deuster went to work for Moritz Schoeffler, publisher of a German-language newspaper named the Wiskonsin-Banner. Four years later he undertook the publication of his own newspaper, a German-language family weekly named The Hausfreund. Six months later he sold that paper and became business manager of the (Milwaukee) See-Bote, a newspaper with great influence among German Catholics of the area. In 1854, tired of administrative chores, he moved to Port Washington to edit the Zeitung, the fourth German-language newspaper with which he was associated. Deuster became a community leader in Port Washington, serving as notary public, clerk of the circuit court, and postmaster as well as editor of the Democratic-oriented Zeitung. In 1856 he had a chance to return to Milwaukee to team up with August Greulich in publishing the See-Bote, and that paper flourished. Less than four years later, in January of 1860, the twenty-eight year old immigrant American became sole proprietor of the

See-Bote, and he rose rapidly in importance as a force in the community.\(^2\)

The See-Bote dated back to the early 1850's, when it was founded by Bishop John Martin Henni to counteract the radicalism and anti-Catholicism preached by several newspapers published in Milwaukee. The Volksfreund, the Flugblätter, and the Humanist were anti-clerical, and their editors believed Catholicism the antithesis of freedom and individualism. Alarmed at the anti-Catholic tone of the press, Bishop Henni authorized the Reverend Dr. Joseph Salzman to establish a German-language weekly to present the Catholic point of view upon the issues of the day. Father Salzman founded the See-Bote and boldly entered the conflict. "Radicalism," he wrote, "has egotism as its basic principle, which will turn to destruction, if necessary, in order to fulfill the attainment of its desires."\(^3\) Although the See-Bote was never the "official" newspaper of the diocese, it published a good deal of church news, and it neutralized the radicalism expressed by the other German-language journals.

When Peter V. Deuster took over direction of the See-Bote early in 1860, sectionalism and abolitionism were national issues, emotionalizing the country. Several months earlier, John Brown had stoked the controversy at Harpers Ferry and Southern radicals talked of secession and separation. Furthermore, 1860 was an election year and Republicans and Democrats argued party politics heatedly and accused each other of bigotry. William H. Seward and Salmon P. Chase seemed to be favored by most Wisconsin Republicans, while Democratic chieftains argued the merits of James Buchanan and Stephen A. Douglas.

Editor Deuster worked hard to keep his readers from joining the Republican party. Since prominent "Forty-eighters like Carl Schurz and Bernhard Domshcke were free-thinkers and abolitionists as well as Republicans, it was easy for the editor of the See-Bote to make a case against the radicalism of the Republican party. Deuster could also point out that most of the Know-Nothings (members of a nativist, anti-Catholic movement of the 1850's) and most temperance advocates were also Republicans. It was possible for Deuster, therefore, to convince German Catholics that their interests were tied to the Democratic party.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) (Milwaukee) See-Bote, March 1, 1854, quoted in Peter Leo Johnson, Croster on the Frontier: A Life of John Martin Henni (Madison, 1959).

After the northern wing of the Democracy nominated Stephen A. Douglas for the presidency and the Republicans nominated Abraham Lincoln, election fever swept the state. Although two other contenders, John Bell and John C. Breckinridge, entered the presidential race in 1860, most Milwaukeeans knew that the race was between Lincoln and Douglas. Deuster criticized Lincoln less than he did the party which "the Rail-Splitter" represented. He defined the Republican party as "a conglomeration of isms"—radicalism, abolitionism, prohibitionism, and Know-Nothingism. He labeled Carl Schurz, who campaigned for Lincoln, "a political mountebank" who would do anything for money, incite passions and encourage fanaticism. He warned his readers not to be deceived by Schurz's excursions in oratory nor his claim that Lincoln would get a large percentage of the German—American vote.5

Although Deuster successfully convinced German Catholics to repudiate Carl Schurz and vote for Stephen A. Douglas, he could not prevent Lincoln from carrying Wisconsin by 20,000 votes. Wisconsin counties most heavily populated by German-Americans gave Douglas a majority over Lincoln. The Democratic party schism, the Lincoln image, President Buchanan's bungling, and the homestead plank—not the officious oratory of Carl Schurz—put Lincoln in the White House in 1860.6

Dramatic events followed each other rapidly. Southern states seceded. Peace and compromise efforts failed. The Fort Sumter affair inaugurated a civil war between the North and the South. President Lincoln called for volunteers to suppress the "insurrection" and issued a number of emergency or extraordinary proclamations. A wave of patriotism swept over the countryside, and flags flew on every hand, "till the whole Northern heavens seemed a perfect aurora borealis of stars and stripes."7

Deuster's failure to bow to the surge of patriotic passion brought attacks from several quarters. "Raise the Palmetto Flag at once," advised the editor of the Milwaukee Journal, "and openly declare that the Government, under which you live, is not to be supported." The Republican editor of the Sentinel added, "Those who are not for their country are against it, and in times of war it is best that all men should be known." The next day the Sentinel again criticized Editor Deuster: "The See-Bote of yesterday, in reply to an item in the Sentinel, endeavors to squirm out of the unenviable position in which its secession predilections have placed it. We again ask our German contemporary a plain question—on which

5 See-Bote, October 31, November 7, 28, 1860.
7 (Chicago) Prairie Farmer, June 6, 1861.
side are you? There can be no incivility in this. How many words are wasted by men when they get in a corner, trying to convince themselves and the public that facts are optical illusions. We affirm that unless the See-Bote is in favor of supporting the government, he [it] is an enemy of the government, and we shall wait with no little anxiety to see how long an article its editor will write to-day to mystify and abuse us, when the thing could be settled in half a dozen words."

The Sentinel’s comments stirred up some misguided patriots, who threatened to burn down or destroy the See-Bote establishment. When fire destroyed Deuster’s home in the Fifth Ward several months later, there was a tendency to suppose “patriots” had gained revenge because Deuster and the See-Bote had not given unequivocal support to the war. The fire, however, was unrelated to the patriotic passions of the hour, for it had started in a bakery and spread to nearby houses.⁹

The See-Bote’s anti-war editorials were mild enough in the early months of the war. Deuster blamed Republicans for defeating compromise efforts, he blamed abolitionists for bringing on the war, and he expressed the fear that the war might evolve into an abolitionist crusade. He questioned the constitutionality of some of President Lincoln’s emergency measures, and he predicted that burdensome taxation and compulsory conscription would be imposed upon the citizenry. Some Democrats, nevertheless, talked of establishing a pro-war Democratic paper to counteract the See-Bote’s influence and “to neutralize its mischievous effects.” Self-styled patriots again talked of using the torch. The Sentinel lashed out at Deuster and the See-Bote for undermining support of the war “among the German element.” “We will not call the See-Bote a pestiferous sheet,” concluded one editorial writer; “its influence is that of a deleterious miasma [miasma] that mingles with the purer air of our city, entering the shades of those who have no safeguards, nor antidotes . . . .”¹⁰

Actually, the See-Bote gave the Lincoln administration qualified support in the first year of the war. Deuster, strongly opposed to abolition, deplored the pressure exerted upon the president to add emancipation as a second objective of the war. When Lincoln revoked General John C. Frémont’s proclamation freeing the slaves of rebels within his jurisdiction, Deuster gave the president a pat on the back. For a time he envisioned Lincoln to be “a faithful, conscientious, constitutional ruler” holding back the flood tide of abolition. He did, however, continue to hope for peace and com-

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⁶ Milwaukee Sentinel, April 18, 19, 1861.
⁹ Ibid., April 19, 20, June 19, 1861; See-Bote, April 25, 1861.
¹⁰ Milwaukee Sentinel, August 9, 21–23, 28, 1861; See-Bote, August 21, 1861.
promise, wanting “spontaneous action by the people” to effect “the calling of a national convention.” He also pointed out that taxes were “ruinous” and arbitrary arrests “unnecessary.” Always he criticized Yankees and the mailed fist of Puritanism. Always he defended General George B. McClellan, a Democrat, against the attack of radical Republicans. Yet he asked for popular support of the “war policies” of the Lincoln Administration, arguing that since the people had not adequately supported compromise before the war, they were obligated to complete “the work which they had endorsed.” A military draft, Deuster re-asserted, would be a necessity.\(^{11}\)

Deuster’s aversion to abolition turned him against Lincoln as the president retreated before abolition pressure and as the number of arbitrary arrests multiplied. Lincoln’s message of March 6, 1862, endorsing compensated emancipation, made Deuster realize that his fears had a solid basis. He referred to abolitionists as “disunion demagogues” or “disunion devils,” and he warned that emancipation would release “a flood of free Negroes and cheap labor” to rob the immigrant Americans of the crumbs on their tables. German-Americans, the *See-Bote* asserted, would lose their jobs to the “contrabands” (the newly freed slaves). One issue of the *See-Bote* carried a long and well-written article entitled “Abolition the Worst Enemy of Free White Labor.” Another carried the story of an employer offering eight contrabands a mere twenty-five cents a day. Free Negroes, Deuster argued, would be shipped to northern cities to replace white laborers—he even said that some abolition-minded employers preferred Negro labor to the immigrant Americans. Using words quite like those earlier enunciated by Karl Marx, Deuster wrote, “Workmen! Be Careful! Organize yourself against this element which threatens your impoverishment and annihilation.” He added, “Let us resist this evil from the beginning! The North belongs to the free white man, not the Negro. To him, Nature has provided other regions.”\(^{12}\)

Spouting pessimism, Deuster saw the war as destroying the ideals which had brought immigrants by the hundreds of thousands. “It is strange,” wrote the editor of the *See-Bote*, “that so many men emigrate to this country. Either the people in the old country do not know that we have worse times before us, or they are having worse times themselves. But the latter is not so. The motives which induce immigration are hope of freedom and lighted taxation. But neither freedom nor light taxation is to be found here. The taxes in the future will be heavier and more oppressive than they were

\(^{11}\) *See-Bote*, January 3, 15, 21, February 19, 26, March 12, April 19, May 14, 28, July 10, 1862.

\(^{12}\) *Ibid.*, April 9, 16, 23, 30, June 4, 1862.
in Germany, and as for freedom, we confess that we are living in the century of the Bastile and a muzzled press. The freedom which we receive from Washington is gone forever, and under the name of political necessity, the government takes away peu à peu the constitutional rights of the people.”

As Deuster became more critical of the Lincoln administration, the editor of the Sentinel cracked the whip again. He accused the See-Bote of substituting partyism for patriotism. He charged that Deuster was guilty of “false statements” regarding the state of affairs in the country. He contended that the See-Bote neutralized the efforts of the recruiting officers, “spawning its treacherous stuff for the special delectation of this class [the German Americans].”

One letter-writer who signed himself “Union” suggested extra-legal measures to silence the See-Bote. “Such papers,” he wrote, “should be suppressed. . . . If they will continue in their work of treason, the people should take the matter into their own hands. I do not wish to encourage violence, but there is a time when forbearance ceases, etc. Traitors at home should be dealt with as the common enemy. Let them beware. ‘A word to the wise’ etc.” Other Milwaukee newspapers added censure. The Daily Wisconsin reprimanded Deuster for preaching “a pro-Southern gospel” and for trying to lead German Americans down the road of treason. William W. Coleman of the German-language Herold offered “to discontinue publication” of his paper and join the army if Deuster would do the same.

Deuster, of course, ignored the criticisms which Republican editors tossed in his direction. The Lincoln administration lost popularity during 1862, after time tempered the patriotic passions which swept the North at the start of the war. The agricultural and financial depression which engulfed the upper Mississippi area in 1861 continued to affect pocketbooks throughout 1862. The frequency of arbitrary arrests gave critics of Lincoln a chance to chant that a despotism seemed to be enveloping the country. The ascendancy of New England industry and eastern capital gave western sectionalists a chance to say that their region was becoming “slave and servant” of New England. Furthermore, the specious spirit of Negrophobia was abroad in the land—it was widespread among German- and Irish-American laborers. Deuster excelled in appealing to the latent spirit of Negrophobia to keep German Catholics in Democratic party ranks. He had referred to Negroes

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13 Ibid., June 11, 1862.
14 Milwaukee Sentinel, June 16, July 22, 29, August 5, 1862.
16 (Milwaukee) Daily Wisconsin, August 13, 1862.
17 Milwaukee Herold, August 13, 1862; Milwaukee Sentinel, August 14, 1862.
as “black cattle” and warned his readers that abolitionists intended to establish a “Negrocracy” in America. He gloated when he heard that Wendell Phillips, “the orator of freedom,” had been stoned and mobbed in Cincinnati, and he hoped that Milwaukeeans would give him like treatment if he appeared in their city. When anti-Negro riots erupted in Cincinnati and Toledo, Deuster blamed abolitionists for “those realistic results.” And he referred to the (Milwaukee) Herold, which endorsed emancipation, as belonging to “the German Nigger Press.”¹⁸

When President Lincoln finally bowed to abolition pressure and issued the preliminary proclamation of September 23, 1862, Deuster acted as if the world had come to an end. He labeled the proclamation “ridiculous,” calling it “an unsavory piece of paper.” He claimed it was “unconstitutional” and deplored its “consequences.” It would incite Negroes in the South to insurrection, repeating the scenes of horror which had been enacted by the Sioux in Minnesota. He again recited his time-worn statement that free Negroes would flood northern cities and take jobs and security away from the German Americans. When the editor of the Milwaukee Sentinel supposed that Negro labor was apt to be “non-competitive,” Deuster disagreed vigorously, and added, “... if free Negro laborers came to take the place of white workers sent off to war to be killed, the problem would be less acute.” When the editor of the Cincinnati Gazette suggested that those who feared the competition of the free Negroes could secure “employment” by presenting themselves “at any of the army recruiting offices,” Deuster’s indignation knew no bounds. It was plainly evident that Peter V. Deuster knew how to develop Negrophobia and weld readers of the Sec-Bote into a solid Democratic bloc.¹⁰

The election returns of November 4, 1862, heartened Deuster and other Democrats. Deuster, a candidate for the State Assembly in the Fifth District, carried his ward by an impressive margin—726 votes to 364 for his Republican opponent.²⁰ The anti-administration tide of the fall of 1862 gave the Wisconsin Democrats three of the six congressional seats—they were deprived of another seat in Congress by the Republican-devised political stratagem called

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¹⁰ Sec-Bote, August 13, October 1, 8, 15, 22, November 3, 1862.

²⁰ Milwaukee Sentinel, November 14, 1862.
"soldier-voting-in-the-field"—and nearly captured control of the state legislature. Democratic victories in northern states like Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York gave Deuster's colleagues a chance to crow and a chance to sponsor "party jollifications." One of Deuster's colleagues, pleased that Democracy was again in style, composed the headline: "Fall Fashions—Democratic Victories."

After Wisconsin Democrats finished celebrating their election victories, they fixed a jaundiced eye upon the pending state draft, which Governor Edward Salomon, at the request of Republican politicos, had postponed from August until after the November election. Early in the war Deuster had supposed that a draft would be necessary and he restated that contention in mid-July, 1862. Fully aware of anti-draft sentiment among most Milwaukee Germans, Deuster did not hesitate to make political capital out of the issue. He built up apprehension about the "coming draft" and he gave publicity to Governor Salomon's proclamation of August 13, 1862, that all foreign-born citizens who had exercised the franchise would be enrolled and subject to conscription, even if they had not applied for their final naturalization papers. The See-Bote also reported on the "draft disorders" in Pennsylvania, and Deuster built up a draft consciousness among his readers. He exposed the postponement of the draft until after the November election as "a political trick." He also questioned the constitutionality of conscription, pointing out that the Pennsylvania State Supreme Court had declared the federal "limping" Draft Act of July 17, 1862 (a federal act providing for states to conscript and recommending procedures for a state-conducted draft), as unconstitutional. Deuster added his own concern about military power becoming superior to civil authority. Furthermore, he complained that excessive and unfair quotas had been assigned to Democratic wards and he implied that the draft would be administered dishonestly because abolitionists, Republicans, and Know-Nothings had been appointed county draft commissioners. And he added that the draft of November, 1862, would be but the first of many. "God Almighty only knows," concluded the doughty Democrat, "when the drafting will stop."

61 Sheboygan Journal, November 21, 1862, Historians generally interpret the fall elections of 1862 as "a repudiation" of Lincolnian policy; see Winfred H. Harbison, "The Elections of 1862 as a Vote of Want of Confidence in President Lincoln," in Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters Papers, XIV (1930), pp. 499-513, and Harry E. Pratt, "The Repudiation of Lincoln's War Policy in 1862—the Swett-Stuart Congressional Campaign," Journal of the Illinois Historical Society, XXIV (April, 1931), pp. 129-140. The thesis that soldier-voting was little more than a political stratagem is advanced in Frank L. Klement, "The Soldier Vote in Wisconsin during the Civil War," Wisconsin Magazine of History, XXVIII (September, 1944), pp. 37-47. In the See-Bote of November 12, 1862, Deuster called the election returns "a popular revolution."

62 See-Bote, July 16, August 6, 20, November 5, 12, 1862.
Governor Salomon and draft officials had every reason to be apprehensive about the approaching lottery. During the enrolling process, officers had received a hostile reception at many homes—several German housewives had used broomsticks to chase out "the intruders" and one Milwaukee woman had thrown scalding water upon an inquisitor. Enrolling officers expressed amazement at the embarrassing number who claimed physical disability, set out for Canada or "the woods," or filed exemptions as "aliens." Most men with families and mortgages worried about the draft. Who would pay the mortgage when it fell due if the breadwinner marched on far-away battlefields or was killed fighting the Confederates? Opposition to the draft seemed to occur in those counties which held a predominance of German-Americans. As immigrants arriving in New York City, many had been met by state agents who described Wisconsin as a land of milk and honey—a region of freedom and opportunity. Compulsory conscription seemed to violate promises made by the state agents. Furthermore, most German-Americans did not understand what the war was all about, nor did they have a chance to develop much loyalty to their newly adopted land. Then too, newspapers like the See-Bote and the (Port Washington) Ozaukee County Advertiser had dealt rather harshly with the Lincoln administration, even challenging the propriety and constitutionality of the draft. The readers of the See-Bote and the Ozaukee County Advertiser were apt to adopt the editorial views of those newspapers as their own.

As "D-day" approached, uneasiness and apprehension increased. Some Milwaukeeans—many from Deuster's own ward—marched up and down the streets shouting "No! No!" ("Nein! Nein!") and carrying "No Draft" ("Nein Militardienst") signs. When the cup of forbearance overflowed in nearby Ozaukee County and brought forth the Port Washington draft riot of November 10, 1862, the draft commissioner of Milwaukee County wisely postponed the draft for a week, until troops from nearby camps could be brought in to overawe the crowds and supervise the lottery.23

Deuster received more than a fair share of the blame for the unrest in Milwaukee and for the Port Washington draft riot. After

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all, the See-Bote enjoyed a widespread circulation among German Catholics in Milwaukee and Ozaukee counties and most of the rioters were German Catholics. The Milwaukee Sentinel, of course, blamed Deuster and the See-Bote for creating a climate of apprehension and hostility which transformed citizens into rioters and mobsters. The (Madison) Wisconsin State Journal derided the editors of the See-Bote and the Democratic-oriented Milwaukee News for teaching the German-Americans (this poor, deluded and ignorant class of men”) that the war had been “provoked” by abolitionists and that it had evolved into a crusade to free the slaves. According to the State Journal, Deuster’s hands were bloodstained and he was clearly guilty of causing the riots. The Republican-minded editor of the (Hartford) Home League also put the blame for the riot at Deuster’s door. The See-Bote was “a baneful influence” among “a large portion of our citizens”—Deuster’s words were “the law and gospel” to many German-Americans and he could have soothed apprehension instead of agitating it. Frederick W. Orban of the (Milwaukee) Banner & Volksfreund tried to blame Deuster and the See-Bote for the discontent, yet at the same time he felt sorry for his fellow Germans.

The poor misguided ones—because we don’t believe they are anything else—will now realize that their resistance against the law has reacted adversely. But since their resistance was caused by love for their mostly poor families—delivered to need without their supporting hands—the authorities should use mildness as far as compatible with the law. It is easier to pronounce a harsh judgment on poor, hard-working people when sitting in a soft, upholstered easy-chair than to bear the miseries of life without questioned reservation.  

Questions as to who deserved the blame for the Port Washington draft riot were also raised in the state legislature. In the state senate, Herman L. Humphrey pointed his finger in Deuster’s direction and asserted that the See-Bote deserved most of the blame. Certainly the editor-publisher of the See-Bote was attacked from many directions.

Emboldened by the election returns, Deuster refuted Republican-made contentions that the rioters were poor, deluded, and ignorant. He ridiculed Republicans for seeming to claim that they had a monopoly upon virtue, literacy, and learning. He offered no apologies for being a critic of conscription or emancipation. He refused to bow before his critics. Instead he seemed to become bolder and more aggressive, more critical of the Lincoln administration with

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24 Banner & Volksfreund, November 18, 1862; (Hartford) Home League, September 7, 1862, March 14, 1863; (Madison) Wisconsin State Journal, November 11, 1862; (Madison) Wisconsin Patriot, November 11, 17, 19, 1862; Milwaukee Sentinel, November 11–17, 1862.

each passing week. He interpreted the election returns of November, 1862, as a mandate to cease his qualified support of the war and become an all-out critic. He bluntly blamed Republicans for the deplorable state of affairs.26

Republicans countered with editorial and oratorical blasts at Deuster and the See-Bote. The federal marshal in Milwaukee called Deuster and Christian Ott, who wrote most of the editorials for the See-Bote, into his office, trying to intimidate them and threatening arrest.27 The Union general commanding the Army of South-east Missouri, through his provost marshal (Major Gustavus Heinrichs) forbade the circulation of the See-Bote in his sector and among his soldiers. He claimed that Deuster’s newspaper rendered “aid and comfort to the enemy” and issued a boycott. “Public journals using as mean and disgraceful language as this paper,” concluded the military edict, “is [sic] injurious to military discipline, and is not the literature to be tolerated in the army.”28

The edict suppressing the See-Bote in one military sector stirred up a controversy, and the issues of treasonable conduct and free press received a public airing. Republicans generally endorsed the army edict and Democrats claimed that a constitutional guarantee had been violated. The issue received a hearing in the State Assembly, where Deuster sat as a member. Andrew J. Turner, of Portage, introduced a resolution which gave “heart approval” to Major Heinrichs’ action in expelling the See-Bote from his department. The resolution was referred to the Committee on Federal Relations. The majority report, dated March 31, 1863, endorsed Major Heinrichs’ edict. “We are of the opinion,” the report read, “that all such newspapers should be suppressed in and out of the army lines.” The report concluded:

In times like these there is no neutral ground. We are either for the government or against it—either patriots or traitors. We cannot be loyal to the government and disloyal to the administration. . . . We, therefore, regard the sentiments promulgated by the See-Bote . . . as of the most dangerous character; and that Major Heinrichs was fully warranted in prohibiting its circulation in the army under his command.29

Democratic members of the Committee on Federal Relations, quite naturally, disagreed with the majority report. Alden S. Sanborn, of Madison, presented a dissenting report which defended Deuster and freedom of the press. Sanborn’s minority report de-

27 Ibid., January 21, 1863.
28 The edict, dated January 12, 1863, and signed by Major Gustavus Heinrichs as “Provost Marshal General, Army of Southeast Missouri,” was published in the Milwaukee Sentinel, January 27, 1863. For some unknown reason, the document does not appear in Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (128 vols., 1880-1901).
scribed the *See-Bote* as "the uncompromising friend of the people, firmly attached to the principles of liberty, an unwavering advocate of the restoration of the United States into the same fraternal relations that existed before sectional parties menaced their disruption." Democratic and Republican legislators, wearing partisan spectacles, saw the same act assuming different shapes.

Neither the *Sentinel*’s fulminations, the threats of a federal marshal, nor a general’s edict checked the *See-Bote*’s criticism of the Lincoln administration. When Congress discussed the need for federal conscription during February, 1863, Deuster printed his anti-draft views. He claimed that federal conscription would destroy civil liberties of individuals as well as the sovereignty of the states. It would keep the Republican party "permanently in power," wiping out the opposition party. The presidency would evolve into a dictatorship and the republic turn into a despotism. Negro troops, Deuster warned his wary readers, might even be employed to enforce the draft and drag white men off to war, insulting them in the process. Yes, "compulsory conscription" and "the excesses of the Administration" might even force the liberty-loving people of the North "to the edge of the chasm," bringing civil war to them.\(^{\text{31}}\)

After the Conscription Act of March 3, 1863, became law, Deuster continued to play critic. He compared the federal measure to "the Polish forcing act," reminiscent of the drafting of the Poles by the Russian government. German Americans, Deuster asserted, would be sacrificed at the whim of New England Yankees. Deuster also criticized the "$300. commutation clause," a provision which absolved a man of military service upon the payment of $300. Rich Republicans, the *See-Bote* supposed, had incorporated that "iniquitous section" into the Conscription Act so that they might stay at home while the poor immigrant Americans would then die upon the battlefields.\(^{\text{32}}\)

Other issues besides federal conscription drew the wrath of Peter V. Deuster and the *See-Bote*. When the Lincoln administration carved West Virginia from the northwestern section of "the Old Dominion," in violation of a constitutional clause guaranteeing the integrity of each state, Deuster printed his protest, labeling such action unwarranted and unconstitutional. When successive issues of greenbacks or legal tender notes were authorized by a Republican-dominated Congress, Deuster cried "Foul!" and claimed that property rights were sacrificed and inflation sanctified. When Congress raised the tax on distilled spirits and considered doubling

\(^{\text{31}}\) *See-Bote*, February 11, 1863.
the levy on fermented liquors, the See-Bote again raised its voice. Deuster believed beer “the healthiest and most innocent alcoholic drink.” The proposed beer tax would fall heaviest upon the laboring classes and those immigrant Americans whose cultural patterns made them beer-drinkers. Deuster also criticized the removal of General George B. McClellan from command of the Army of the Potomac and decried the arrest of Clement L. Vallandigham, prominent Copperhead and critic of the Lincoln administration, early in May of 1863. He called the trial of Vallandigham of Ohio by a military commission in an area where the civil courts were open “an outrage,” arguing that force and arbitrary measures had been substituted for wisdom and justice. He applauded when Ohio Democrats retaliated by nominating Vallandigham as their party’s gubernatorial nominee. Such bold action, Deuster argued, was a proper protest against “usurpation and tyranny.” As far as Deuster was concerned, the wheel of revolution turned too fast and too far. The “more radical measures of the Lincoln Administration” could be compared with “the excessive measures of the French Revolution.” Carl Schurz, a onetime Milwaukeean, seemed to be one of Deuster’s favorite targets. The See-Bote seldom missed a chance to throw mud at Schurz, who vainly sought military glory upon Civil War battlefields. Deuster considered General Schurz “incompetent” and “egotistical,” qualified only to carry a gun in “Wide-Awake parades.”

A peace movement gathered momentum during the first six months of 1863 and Deuster jumped with alacrity upon that bandwagon. Continued war might crush out the last vestiges of civil rights, for it continued to centralize the government. The weary boatman at the river Styx ferried heavy loads, and the people on the home front tired of the bloodshed and shuddered at the long, long casualty lists. Defeatism became more and more widespread as some became convinced that the South could not be conquered. Then, too, ruinous taxes sapped the nation’s economy and robbed men of their hard-earned dollars. Many Democrats were convinced that the original objective of the war had been perverted. New England capital seemed to have moved into the driver’s seat, using Lincoln as a pawn in its game to make western interests servile to eastern interests. Conciliation and compromise could stop the bloodshed and the centralization of the government, giving midwesterners a chance to regain the balance of power they had held politically before the war. “When will the hideous moloch who holds the press and sword of this nation,” asked one of Deuster’s

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friends, “call off his dogs of war, and suffer peace once more to bless our bleeding country?”

Just when war weariness and defeatism seemed to be taking over the northern heart, the fortunes of war changed. The tide turned at Gettysburg and Vicksburg early in July, 1863. The peace movement then retreated, for it vacillated with the vicissitudes of war, advancing with Union defeats and ebbing with Union victories. Deuster, evidently convinced that a draft was necessary, quit criticizing the Conscription Act and turned, instead, to promoting “a social plan” to help needy draftees. Deuster’s devastating criticism of the administration also seemed to soften, giving way to mildness. Early in November, 1863, the See-Bote even printed an advertisement from the general government. The editor of the Milwaukee Sentinel, somewhat chagrined, protested, asserting that the Herald was more deserving than the See-Bote. “Such being the case,” concluded the editor of the Sentinel, “We hope no further official patronage will be bestowed upon a paper which is doing all it can to embarrass the government. Let the proper authorities look to the matter.”

Early in 1864, Republicans and Democrats began to talk of presidential candidates and to weigh the possibility of Lincoln’s re-election. Union military victories, like those at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, combined with Republican political victories at the polls in October and November, 1863, gave Lincoln a claim to renomination and re-election. Although some dissident Republicans favored John C. Frémont as a candidate, the party’s national convention put Lincoln’s name at the head of the ticket. From the first, it was almost a foregone conclusion that Deuster’s party would name George B. McClellan as its choice in the presidential contest of 1864. The presidential race stirred partyism and Deuster joined other Democrats in denouncing Lincoln and praising McClellan. The See-Bote seemed to delight in reporting critical comments made by Deuster’s fellow Democrats. Edward G. Ryan, prominent party mogul, had described Lincoln as “a weak, vain, amiable man” characterized by “his utter imbecility and . . . moral incapacity” —“a mere doll, worked by strings.” Mayor Abner Kirby, another Milwaukee Democrat, labeled Lincoln “a weak and vacillating president” and “a tool of fanatics” —“the weakest man on the whole list of presidents.” Deuster, who had earlier judged President Lincoln “the most incapable of statesmen and the most irresponsible of butchers of men,” predicted that history would deal harshly with the president. He claimed that Lincoln’s nomination was made at

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84 Sheboygan Journal, April 9, 1863.
85 See-Bote, November 5, 1863; Milwaukee Sentinel, November 6, 1863.
86 Quoted in the Milwaukee News, July 2, 1863; See-Bote, October 14, 1863.
87 See-Bote, April 24, 1864.
a convention dominated by rascals—"griffins, hypocrites, pharisees, shoddy contractors, and 'two-legged cattle.'" There was not "an honest man in the whole convention." These "hell-on-earth men" nominated Lincoln, Deuster wrote, despite "the sighing of the widows, the complaining of the children, and the moaning of the wounded upon the battlefield." Lincoln had no "conscience;" he was guilty of telling smutty stories while soldiers were dying. The See-Bote associated "Godlessness," "perjury," "irresponsibility" and "dirty ditties" with Lincoln and radicalism. Evidently God was punishing the nation for the sins of the Lincoln administration, imposing suffering, taxes, and hardship upon the people because radicals and fanatics directed affairs in Washington.  

The See-Bote, of course, endorsed McClellan's candidacy and placed his picture on the front page. It reviewed McClellan's qualifications most favorably, praising the man and the soldier. McClellan could lead the nation out of "the desert of troubles" and into the promised land. Lincoln's policy was failure; it was time for a change. Lincoln's re-election would mean more "troubulous times", more drafts and more bloodshed.

Party loyalties and the heat of political campaigns sometimes prompts men to make irrational statements. Such was the case when "Brick" Pomeroy of the LaCrosse Democrat hoped that "some bold hand" would pierce Lincoln's heart "with dagger point for the public good." Such was the case when the editor of the Beaver Dam Argus wrote, "History shows several instances where the people have only been saved by assassination of their rulers, and history may repeat itself in this country. The time may come when it is absolutely necessary that the people do away with their rulers in the quickest way possible." And such was the case when Deuster wished Lincoln were dead. Upon hearing the story that a soldier standing next to Lincoln (while the President was visiting the front lines) was wounded by a bullet. Deuster wrote, "Oh, if a fortunate coincident had caused that bullet to pierce the black, inhuman heart of this great butcher of men, rather than lodge in the leg of the poor soldier."

Despite the heat generated by newspaper editors and excited orators, the election passed off with few incidents in Milwaukee and Wisconsin. Although Deuster's ward and the city of Milwaukee gave McClellan a two-to-one margin (4,908 votes for McClellan,

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38 Ibid., December 18, 1862, June 15, July 27, 1864.
39 Ibid., September 14, October 25, 1864.
40 La Crosse Democrat, August 28, 1864; Beaver Dam Argus, September 14, 1864; See-Bote, August 9, 1864. An account of the election of 1864 in Wisconsin can be found in Frank L. Klement, "Wisconsin and the Re-election of Lincoln in 1864: A Chapter of Civil War History," in Wisconsin in Three Wars [Historical Messenger, XXII (March, 1966)] pp. 20-42.
2,535 for Lincoln), Lincoln carried Wisconsin by 17,000 votes and won re-election by a comfortable margin.41

Deuster was not surprised by the election returns, but he expressed his disappointment nevertheless. His editorials seemed to say, "The Republicans started this war; let them finish it." "Everybody," he wrote, "views the future with apprehension and anxiety." He seemed depressed and disgusted, and he tossed another taunt in Lincoln's direction: "His watchword is war—that's what the vote meant. Disintegration of the country, with the end of civil order and collapse of the government, will come. Then the people, deceived by Lincoln, will wake up and realize their plight."42

In the closing months of the war Deuster remained a caustic critic and an unredeemed Democrat. He referred to the country's president as "a usurper," and he moaned each time the president called for more troops.43 Yet Deuster and most Democrats sympathized with President Lincoln when he feuded with the radicals in his own party over Reconstruction policy. Lincoln favored a rather mild Reconstruction policy, whereas the radicals wanted vindictive measures and civil rights for the newly freed Negroes. Democrats like Deuster and Edward G. Ryan openly supported the president against most leaders of his party.

Lincoln's death at the hands of an assassin shocked Peter V. Deuster. He feared that the president's death might give the radical Republicans control of Reconstruction and that "retribution and revenge" might become official policy. Deuster even claimed that Democrats could mourn with a "pure conscience." He rationalized for his readers: "We have voted against Lincoln's election; written against it; spoken against it. What we have said and written was done with a clear conscience. We may say with an equally clear conscience that there are no more sincere mourners today—none who deplore the death of President Lincoln more than the Democracy of the Northern States."44

Deuster's role as a Copperhead and critic of Lincolnian policy did not adversely affect his business or political success. The See-Bote became a prosperous business enterprise in the postwar years. For two years, until the "Great Chicago Fire" of 1871, he also published the Chicago Daily Union, another German-language newspaper. During the postwar years he again sought public office, serving one term in the state senate and three in Congress. In the

41 The soldier vote padded the rather scant majority Lincoln received of the home vote in Wisconsin. The canvassers counted 68,906 Lincoln votes and 62,494 McClellan votes cast in Wisconsin—they set aside the Kewanee County votes (157 for Lincoln, 753 for McClellan) because "no seal was attached." Lincoln received 13,805 of the 16,789 votes cast by soldiers in the field.
42 See-Bote, November 23, December 14, 1864.
43 Ibid., February 11, 25, 1865; Milwaukee Sentinel, February 27, 1865.
44 Milwaukee Sentinel, April 26, 1865.
postwar era he gained recognition as the most forthright and respected champion of the wants and rights of the German Catholics of the Milwaukee area.

Peter V. Deuster can be classified as a conservative. He opposed the changes which the Civil War imposed upon his adopted country. He opposed the centralization of the government, for the war helped to transform a federal union into a truly national state. He opposed the triumph of industrialization and its ascendancy over agriculture, objecting to the trend which caused the upper Midwest to bow to the economic domination of the Northeast. He opposed the extension of democratic rights to the former slaves; he opposed emancipation and the granting of civil rights to the newly free. Yet he was a leader and spokesman for many German Americans because he could put into words the hopes and the fears of his countrymen, immigrant Americans adjusting to their American environment.