

Allentown mayor blames Bethlehem Steel for quarantine over “so-called influenza”

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Spanish Flu](#) April 6, 2020

🌸 Latest in a series of posts on the Spanish Flu 🌸

For perspective on our current coronavirus situation, we are following the entrance of the 1918 Spanish Influenza, that paragon of pandemics, into the minds and bodies of Lehigh Valley residents who got their news through the Morning Call (the files of the Bethlehem Globe are closed to us at the moment).

So we are going almost day-by-day from the arrival of the Spanish Flu in the U.S. on September 13, 1918, marking local awareness of and local events related to the Flu as seen by a reader of the *Morning Call*.***

On October 5 the *Call* reported that, pursuant to an order by state health authorities, the Allentown City Council — acting as a Board of Health — voted to close “all public places of amusement and saloons” in tandem with Bethlehem and Easton.



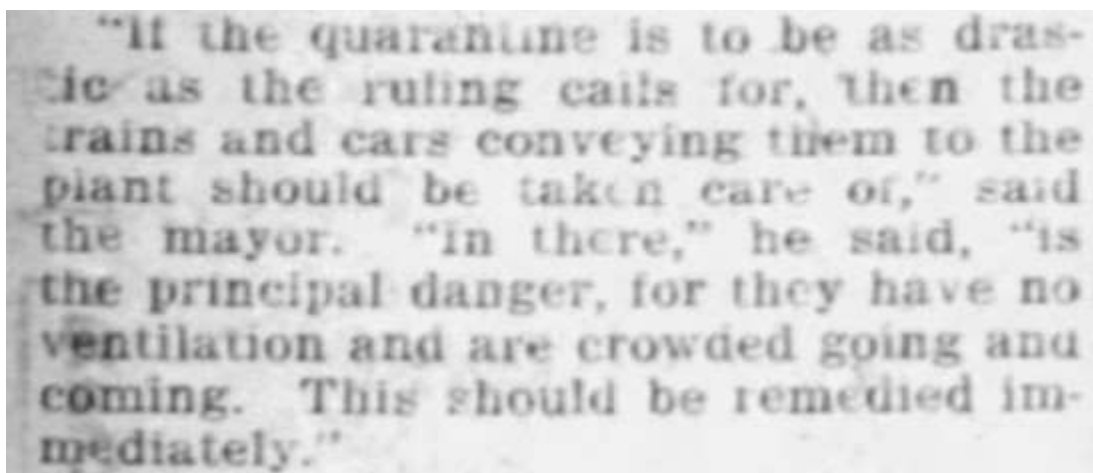
A vote much to the chagrin of the Allentown Mayor, who was “strong in his denunciation of the order, calling it the work of the Bethlehem Steel Company officials” — apparently referring to the Steel’s desire to insure a proper and steady work force for its war effort responsibilities.

In his denunciation of the action, the Mayor stated “that Bethlehem was filthy and dirty, and that a wagon load of refuse could be secured from

three blocks of the highways and that the streets were covered with thick layers of dust, the worst breeder of disease.”

One wishes we had access to the Bethlehem papers for rebuttals to that one!

It's also curious that the A-town mayor focuses on city dirt as the breeder of the disease (and apparently implying that Allentown streets are not in such condition). He is closer here in his denunciation of the quality of public transportation to the common wisdom about conditions favoring the disease:



“If the quarantine is to be as drastic as the ruling calls for, then the trains and cars conveying them to the plant should be taken care of,” said the mayor. “In there,” he said, “is the principal danger, for they have no ventilation and are crowded going and coming. This should be remedied immediately.”

Basically, however, it appears that the A-town mayor was a kind of pandemic denier, attributing this “so-called influenza” to nothing more than a widespread bout of the common cold caused by people not heating their homes properly.

What!?! Just the day before the Call had reported 14,000 new (!) cases in army camps!

There are at present sixty-six cases of the so-called influenza in the city; but were they carried down to the finer points they could be laid to the coal situation, as the houses are being improperly heated at this time so as to conserve coal for the colder days that are coming. Had the situation been the same last fall as it is now, then there would have been as many cases of sickness reported of the same nature, but no thought would have been given it for they would have been thought coincident with conditions.

The shut-down order, concluded the Mayor in the classic style of exaggerated political oratory, is "Prussianism, and just what we are fighting for 'over there' now and was the work of autocrats and not in reason."

O, my.

But Bethlehem was not without its craziness as the shut-down tightened.

Next.

*** *The Call newspaper article indicated that there were five daily newspapers in Allentown at the time. What riches! Who knew?*

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