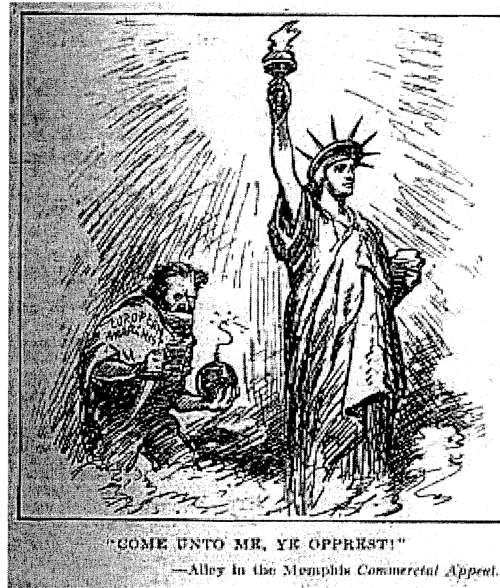


The Red Scare

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Shortly after the end of World War I, the Red Scare took hold in the United States. Several factors contributed to the hysteria during which a nationwide fear of communists, socialists, anarchists, and other radicals gripped the country in 1919-20.

The roots of the Scare go back to the war when a fervent patriotism was promoted by propagandist George Creel, chairman of the United States Committee on Public Information. While American boys were fighting the "Huns" abroad, individuals and groups that opposed the war, in particular socialists, were often portrayed as un-American and unpatriotic.

Meanwhile, in November 1917, the Bolsheviks (communists) overthrew the new democratic government in Russia establishing the world's first communist State. Many communists advocated world-wide revolution and formed the Comintern (Communist International) which would help form communist organizations around the world.

Another factor contributing to the Red Scare was the labor unrest that developed after the war. By the end of 1918, approximately nine million people worked in war industries, while another four million were serving in the armed forces. Once the war was over, these people were left without jobs, and war industries were left without contracts. Economic difficulties and worker unrest increased. Many workers went on strike.

One of the first major strikes after the end of the war was the Seattle shipyard strike of 1919. On January 21, 35,000 shipyard workers in Seattle struck. Weeks later, an additional 60,000 workers left their jobs in support of the striking longshoremen. The Seattle strike suddenly became national news, with newspaper headlines across the country telling of Seattle's impending doom.

On September 9, the Boston police force went on strike. A panic that "Reds" were behind the strike took over Boston despite the lack of any radicalism on the part of the striking police officers. Although the city experienced primarily looting and vandalism (as well as some rioting), papers around the country ran inflammatory headlines. Stories told of massive riots, reigns of terror, and federal troops firing machine guns on a mob. Weeks later, a nation-wide

steel strike occurred. 275,000 steel workers walked off their jobs, and soon the strikers numbered 365,000. Three quarters of Pittsburgh's steel mills were shut down. Riots, attributed only to the strikers with no newspapers laying any blame on police or political leaders, resulted in many places.

In addition to the strikes, the nation was terrorized by a series of bombings. In late April 1919, approximately 30 booby trap bombs were mailed to prominent politicians, including the Attorney General of the United States, as well as justice officials and financiers, including John D. Rockefeller. Another twelve bombs were recovered before reaching their targets.

In June 1919, eight bombs far larger than those mailed in April exploded almost simultaneously in several U.S. cities. Fatalities included a New York City night watchman, a passer-by, and one of the anarchists who died placing the bomb at the home of Attorney General Palmer. All of the bombs were delivered with a pink flyer with the heading "Plain Words" that accused the intended victims of waging class war and promised: "We will destroy to rid the world of your tyrannical institutions."

The strikes and bombings led many to conclude that a Communist revolution was spreading throughout the country. Hysteria took hold. "Red hunting" became the national obsession. Colleges were deemed to be hotbeds of communism, and professors were labeled as radicals. The hunt reached down to public secondary schools where many teachers were fired for current or prior membership in even the most mildly of "leftist" organizations.

The government, too, was not immune to anti-communistic hysteria. The Justice Department, under Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, arrested, imprisoned or deported thousands of supposed radicals. These arrests were often made without warrants and for spurious reasons. Arrestees were often denied counsel and contact with the outside world. If the national press is any indicator of the predominant mood of the country, then the efforts of the Justice Department were overwhelmingly supported by the masses because the raids, deportations, and arrests were all championed on the front page of most every paper. All told, thousands of innocent people were jailed or deported, and many more were arrested or questioned. On January 2, 1920 alone, over 4,000 alleged radicals were arrested in thirty-three cities.

Legislatures also reflected the national sentiment against radicals. Numerous local and state legislatures passed some sort of ordinance against radicals and radical activity. Thirty-two states made it illegal to display the red flag of communism. The New York Legislature expelled five duly elected Socialist assemblymen from its ranks.

The Red Scare quickly ran its course and, by the summer of 1920, it was largely over. The nation turned its collective attention to more leisurely pursuits.

1. Explain FOUR causes of the Red Scare.
2. Do you think the fear of Revolution was justified? Explain
3. What actions were taken against suspected political radicals? Do you think these actions were justified? Explain.
4. Have there been other times in American history, when people have had similar fears? Explain.