

## The Red Scare

Beginning in the years of the Great War and continuing for the decade after its conclusion, a growing climate of xenophobia, anti-radicalism, and nativism accompanied a repressive shift in the government's attitude toward dissent. During this period, "alien" residents were targeted and the first amendment rights of Americans were sometimes supplanted as the country succumbed to a kind of anti-communist hysteria.

The cartoon of a "European Anarchist" stalking Lady Liberty appears below.

This 1920 article entitled, "The Most Brainiest Man" relates the story of a man who goes to jail for praising Lenin. It illustrates the sometimes ludicrous results of the Red Scare.

In this excerpt from Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's *The Case Against the "Reds"*, he asserts the criminal menace of Bolshevism is infiltrating every aspect of American life and vows to arrest and deport every one of the radicals.



"COME UNTO ME, YE OPPRESSED!"

—Alley in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*.

Question to Consider:

1. Do you agree or disagree with Palmer's assertion that "there could be no nice distinctions drawn between the theoretical ideals of the radicals and their actual violations of our national laws."?
2. A debate over aspects of National Security exists in contemporary America. What if this ethos were applied in America today with respect to terrorism? Would you feel safer?

# Between The Wars

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## Fear of Dissent

This completely and thoroughly ridiculous episode, taken from *The Nation*, April 17 1920, would be funny if it had not ended up in a jail sentence. It demonstrates the ridiculous lengths to which fear of dissent might be taken.

### "The Most Brainiest Man"

A BOND salesman named Herbert Warner walked into a clothing store in Waterbury, Connecticut, in January. He had been told that some one there might buy bonds. Joseph Yenowsky, a salesman, met him. Yenowsky's savings consisted of \$300 in Liberty bonds, and he refused to convert them. The result was an argument about bonds, sugar, and Lenin, followed by Yenowsky's conviction under the Connecticut Sedition law, and his sentence to six months in jail.

This Connecticut Sedition law, be it said, is one of the shortest and most comprehensive laws on the statute books. "No person," it declares, "shall in public, or before any assemblage of ten or more persons, advocate in any language any measure, doctrine, proposal, or propaganda intended to injuriously affect the Government of the United States or the State of Connecticut." The measure advocated, it will be noted, need not involve force or illegality; the sole test of its criminality is some one's opinion as to what is "injurious."

Now Yenowsky is a Socialist and a member of the American Legion, and on both counts he disliked a bond salesman who had never been in the army. When Warner suggested opportunities for rapid wealth, Yenowsky retorted "There is only one way of making money quick, and that is to steal it." "Steal in a legal way," he explained. "Rockefeller, he can go out and steal millions and get away with it."

Here the testimony diverges. According to Warner, "We talked on some things which I do not remember." According to Yenowsky, Warner thought Rockefeller's method "a good way to get ahead." This naturally led the discussion to wander. It touched the price of sugar, and led to a copy of the *Liberator* lying on the table. Yenowsky pointed to a picture of Lenin.

"There is what I consider one of the brainiest men in the world," he says he remarked. According to Warner, however, he declared that Lenin was "the greatest, the most brainiest man on earth today."

"Are you sure he used that expression?" the Magistrate asked, when the case came up in court.

only what I have read in the newspapers here."

"And more than most of us want to know about them," came from the Magistrate.

The defense rested. There was no summing-up.

"I will take jurisdiction," the Court announced immediately. "Six months in jail. Bonds for an appeal, 51,000."

L. S. G.

# Between The Wars

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## Fear of Dissent

A. Mitchell Palmer

*The Case Against the "Reds"*

*A powerful reaction against "radicalism" in various forms swept the country immediately after the end of the war. One of the leading progenitors and sponsors of the "Red Scare" was the Attorney General of the United States, who summarizes his fears of Bolshevism and his methods of extirpating it.*

SOURCE. A Mitchell Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" *Forum* (1920), 63:173- 185.

In this brief review of the work which the Department of Justice has undertaken, to tear out the radical seeds that have entangled American ideas in their poisonous theories, I desire not merely to explain what the real menace of communism is, but also to tell how we have been compelled to clean up the country almost unaided by any virile legislation. Though I have not been embarrassed by political opposition, I have been materially delayed because the present sweeping processes of arrests and deportation of seditious aliens should have been vigorously pushed by Congress last spring. The failure of this is a matter of record in the Congressional files.

The anxiety of that period in our responsibility when Congress, ignoring the seriousness of these vast organizations that were plotting to overthrow the Government, failed to act, has passed. The time came when it was obviously hopeless to expect the hearty cooperation of Congress in the only way to stamp out these seditious societies in their open defiance of law by various forms of propaganda.

Like a prairie-fire, the blaze of revolution was sweeping over every American institution of law and order a year ago. It was eating its way into the homes of the American workmen, its sharp tongues of revolutionary heat were licking the altars of the churches, leaping into the belfry of the school bell, crawling into the sacred corners of American homes, seeking to replace marriage vows with libertine laws, burning up the foundations of society.

Robbery, not war, is the ideal of communism. This has been demonstrated in Russia, Germany, and in America. As a foe, the anarchist is fearless of his own life, for his creed is a fanaticism that admits no respect of any other creed. Obviously it is the creed of any criminal mind, which reasons always from motives impossible to clean thought. Crime is the degenerate factor in society.

Upon these two basic certainties, first that the "Reds" were criminal aliens and secondly that the American Government must prevent crime, it was decided that there could be no nice distinctions drawn between the theoretical ideals of the radicals and their actual violations of our national laws. An assassin may have brilliant intellectuality, he may be able to excuse his murder or robbery with fine oratory, but any theory which excuses crime is not wanted in America. This is no place for the criminal to flourish, nor will he do so so long as the rights of common citizenship can be exerted to prevent him.

## OUR GOVERNMENT IN JEOPARDY

It has always been plain to me that when American citizens unite upon any national issue they are generally right, but it is sometimes difficult to make the issue clear to them. If the Department of Justice could succeed in attracting the attention of our optimistic citizens to the issue of internal revolution in this country, we felt sure there would be no revolution. The Government was in jeopardy; our private information of what was being done by the organization known as the Communist Party of America, with headquarters in Chicago, of what was being done by the Communist Internationale under their manifesto planned at Moscow last March by Trotsky, Lenin and others addressed "To the Proletariats of All Countries," of what strides the Communist Labor Party was making, removed all doubt. In this conclusion we did not ignore the definite standards of personal liberty, of free speech, which is the very temperament and heart of the people. The evidence was examined with the utmost care, with a personal leaning toward freedom of thought and word on all questions.

The whole mass of evidence, accumulated from all parts of the country, was scrupulously scanned, not merely for the written or spoken differences of viewpoint as to the Government of the United States, but, in spite of these things, to see if the hostile declarations might not be sincere in their announced motive to improve our social order. There was no hope of such a thing.

By stealing, murder and lies, Bolshevism has looted Russia not only of its material strength but of its moral force. A small clique of outcasts from the East Side of New York has attempted this, with what success we all know. Because a disreputable alien (Leon Bronstein, the man who now calls himself Trotsky) can inaugurate a reign of terror from his throne room in the Kremlin, because this lowest of all types known to New York can sleep in the Czar's bed, while hundreds of thousands in Russia are without food or shelter, should Americans be swayed by such doctrines?

Such a question, it would seem, should receive but one answer from America.

My information showed that communism in this country was an organization of thousands of aliens who were direct allies of Trotsky. Aliens of the same misshapen caste of mind and indecencies of character, and it showed that they were making the same glittering promises of lawlessness, of criminal autocracy to Americans, that they had made to the Russian peasants. How the Department of Justice discovered upwards of 60,000 of these organized agitators of the Trotsky doctrine in the United States is the confidential information upon which the Government is now sweeping the nation clean of such alien filth....

## WILL DEPORTATION CHECK BOLSHEVISM?

Behind, and underneath, my own determination to drive from our midst the agents of Bolshevism with increasing vigor and with greater speed, until there are no more of them left among us, so long as I have the responsible duty of that task, I have discovered the hysterical methods of these revolutionary humans with increasing amazement and suspicion. In the confused information that sometimes reaches the people they are compelled to ask questions which involve the reasons for my acts against the "Reds." I have been asked, for instance, to what extent deportation will check radicalism in this country. Why not ask what will become of the United States Government if these alien radicals are permitted to carry out the principles of the Communist Party as embodied in its so-called laws, aims and regulations?

There wouldn't be any such thing left. In place of the United States Government we should have the horror and terrorism of bolsheviki tyranny such as is destroying Russia now. Every scrap of radical literature demands the overthrow of our existing government. All of it demands obedience to the instincts of criminal minds, that is, to the lower appetites, material and moral. The whole purpose of communism appears to be a mass formation of the criminals of the world to overthrow the decencies of private life, to usurp property that they have not earned, to disrupt the present order of life regardless of health, sex or religious rights. By a literature that promises the wildest dreams of such low aspirations, that can occur to only the criminal minds,, communism distorts our social law....

It has been inferred by the "Reds" that the United States Government, by arresting and deporting them, is returning to the autocracy of Czardom, adopting the system that created the severity of Siberian banishment. My reply to such charges is that in our determination to maintain our government we are treating our alien enemies with extreme consideration. To deny them the privilege of remaining in a country which they have openly deplored as an unenlightened community, unfit for those who prefer the privileges of Bolshevism, should be no hardship. It strikes me as an odd form of reasoning that these Russian Bolsheviks who extol the Bolshevik rule should be so unwilling to return to Russia. The nationality of most of the alien "Reds" is Russian and German. There is almost no other nationality represented among them.

It has been impossible in so short a space to review the entire menace of the internal revolution in this country as I know it, but this may serve to arouse the American citizen to its reality, its danger, and the great need of united effort to stamp it out, under our feet, if needs be. It is being done. The Department of Justice will pursue the attack of these "Reds" upon the Government of the United States with vigilance, and no alien, advocating the overthrow of existing law and order in this country, shall escape arrest and prompt deportation.

It is my belief that while they have stirred discontent in our midst, while they have caused irritating strikes, and while they have infected our social ideas with the disease of their own minds and their unclean morals we can get rid of them! and not until we have done so shall we have removed the menace of Bolshevism for good.

Source: A. Mitchell Palmer, " The Case Against the Reds," Part III Peacemaking,

# Between The Wars



## A Satirical Essay on the Red Scare

ROBERT BENCHLEY: The Making of a Red

Source: *Nation*, March 15, 1919.

You COULDN 'T HAVE ASKED for anyone more regular than Peters. He was an eminently safe citizen. Although not rich himself, he never chafed under the realization that there were others who possessed great wealth. In fact, the thought gave him rather a comfortable feeling. Furthermore, he was one of charter members of the war. Long before President Wilson saw the light, Peters was advocating the abolition of German from the public-school curriculum. There was, therefore, absolutely nothing in his record which would in the slightest degree alter the true blue of a patriotic litmus. And he considered himself a liberal when he admitted that there might be something in this man Gompers, after all. That is how safe he was.

But one night he made a slip. It was ever tiny a slip, but in comparison with it De Maupassant's famous piece of string was barren of consequences. Shortly before the United States entered the war, Peters made a speech at a meeting of the Civic League in his home town. His subject was "Interurban Highways: Their Development in the Past and Their Possibilities for the Future." So far, 100 percent American. But, in the course of his talk, he happened to mention the fact that war, as an institution, has almost always had an injurious effect on public improvements of all kinds. In fact (and note this well-the government's sleuth in the audience did) he said that, all other things being equal, if he were given his choice of war or peace in the abstract, he would choose peace as a condition under which to live. Then he went on to discuss the comparative values of macadam and wood blocks for paving.

In the audience was a civilian representative of the Military Intelligence Service. He had a premonition that some sort of attempt was going to be made at this meeting of the Civic League to discredit the war and America's imminent participation therein. And he was not disappointed (no Military Intelligence sleuth ever is), for in the remark of Peters, derogatory to war as an institution, his sharp ear detected the accent of the Wilhelmstrasse.

Time went by. The United States entered the war, and Peters bought Liberty Bonds. He didn't join the Army, it is true, but, then, neither did James M. Beck, and it is an open secret that Mr. Beck was for the war. Peters did what a few slangy persons called "his bit," and not without a certain amount of pride. But he did not hear the slow, grinding noise from that district in which are located the mills of the

from the House Committee saying that, at a special meeting, it had been decided that he had placed himself in a position offensive to the loyal members of the club and that it was with deep regret that they informed him, etc. As he stumbled out into the street, he heard someone whisper to an out-of-town friend, "There goes Emma Goldman's husband."

As the days went by, things grew unbelievably worse. He was referred to in public meetings whenever an example of civic treachery was in order. A signed advertisement in the newspapers protesting, on behalf of the lineal descendants of the Grand Duke Sergius, against the spread of Bolshevism in northern New Jersey, mentioned a few prominent snakes in the grass, such as Trotzky, Victor Berger, Horace W. Peters, and Emma Goldman.

Then something snapped. Peters began to let his hair grow long and neglected his linen. Each time he was snubbed on the street he uttered a queer guttural sound and made a mark in a little book he carried about with him. He bought a copy of "Colloquial Russian at a Glance," and began picking out inflammatory sentences from the *Novy Mir*. His wife packed up and went to stay with her sister when he advocated, one night at dinner, the communization of women. The last prop of respectability having been removed, the descent was easy. Emma Goldman, was it? Very well, then, Emma Goldman it should be! Bolshevist, was he? They had said it! "After all, who is to blame for this?" he mumbled to himself "Capitalism! Militarism! Those Prussians in the Intelligence Department and the Department of Justice! The damnable bourgeoisie who sit back and read their Times and their Tribune and believe what they read there!" He had tried explanations. He had tried argument. There was only one thing left. He found it on page 112 of a little book of Emma Goldman's that he always carried around with him.

You may have read about Peters the other day. He was arrested, wearing a red shirt over his business cutaway and carrying enough TNT to shift the Palisades back into the Hackensack marshes. He was identified by an old letter in his pocket from Henry Cabot Lodge thanking him for a telegram of congratulation Peters had once sent him on the occasion of a certain speech in the Senate.

The next morning the Times said, editorially, that it hoped the authorities now saw that the only way to crush Bolshevism was by the unrelenting use of force.