

Rise of anti communism under president harry s. truman in post-war usa

[Politics](#), [Communism](#)



The Beginning of the Red Scare

America emerged from World War Two as victors, as the leading global power, in comparison to the other powers, she experienced a smoother transition into peacetime, especially as her economy flourished, mainly due to the increase in demand for consumer items provided by the post-war baby boomers. This notion of the "American Dream" was soon to be threatened by the smears of red from Communism. Once allies, the Soviet Union and the United States found themselves engaged in a Cold War. A similar situation began in America, where friend became foe, as accusation's, based on hearsay, of having Communist affiliations began destroying people's lives. It marked the start of a political repression that took over the nation, this "Red Scare" surpassed its predecessor in longevity and with the hysteria it created. The nature of the war meant more and more people were becoming inclined to Communism, furthermore the tension created by the Cold War climate saw an increase in anti-Communism in America, especially when the Soviet Union exploded a missile before America did, and when China was taken over by Communists, these setbacks made the public wonder whether there were Communist spies infiltrating the United States government. This may explain why there was such a scare, however, it took the smallest indication of involvement with Communism for a citizen to be questioned, the ruthlessness of HUAC and the manipulative tactics Joseph McCarthy present evidence for the anti-Communism to be a in fact a witch hunt which destroyed the careers and reputations of its unfortunate victims.

Communism did not emerge earlier as the Capitalist society was thriving, nevertheless, the American society was still flawed, racism was an issue being faced every day by African American's and workers were being underpaid. During the war, the Soviet Union solely amongst the powers stood up to Fascism, while America and the other Western Powers allowed Germany, Italy and Japan to invade and conquer Ethiopia, Rhineland, China, and Austria. Communism was heroic, it defeated Hitler, and was an incredible superpower that the world "respected and feared". These could be valid reasons as to why the Communist Party membership increased from 66,000 members in 1939 to surpassing 75,000 members at the beginning of 1947, furthermore the nature of the post-war climate allowed the Communist Party to thrive, it had many allies in the form of magazines, newspapers and trade unions that were forming- allowing them to have a larger influence. This may be evidence for the argument that it was reasonable for the anti-Communist attitudes at the time to be blamed on a Red Scare, as numbers were increasing in regard to involvement in communism but if you compare this 75,000 members to the population of America at the time which was 144.1 million people, the party appealed to the minority, who felt the injustice of the capitalist society, and on the large scale of things was miniscule.

The Loyalty Order

Truman inherited post-war America where Communism featured heavily in politics, with the Republicans publicly denouncing the late President Roosevelt and Liberal Democrats within his administration for sympathising

with Stalin's "Communist" needs. This criticising seemed to have the desired effect of belittling the Democrats- the 1946 Congressional Election saw the Republicans emerge as victors, therefore indicating to Truman that the public were disgruntled with his administration, and the Democratic Party needed to start taking a stance against communism otherwise the long-term effect could be Truman losing the 1948 presidential election. On March 22nd, 1947 Truman issued Executive Order 9835, the 'Loyalty Order' with the aim of uprooting government workers who had Communist affiliations, by examining all aspects of the employees personal and political lives, if after examination they were found to be "disloyal", they would be fired. There was an issue, Communists were widely known for their ability to hide their identities, thus why the examining board had to collect evidence against the employee, but the employee, while being allowed a lawyer, had access to virtually none of the court proceeding rights including facing their accusers. This made it harder for people to defend themselves as they had no idea where the evidence had come from, the fight was not a fair one, making it a witch hunt. The Truman Doctrine, which provided economic and military assistance to countries in order to protect them from radical ideologies such as Communism, was released at the same time as the Executive Order, it was a tactical move on Truman's part, if he had not done this, he would be viewed as hypocritical- for not investigating at home especially after the Republican's previous criticisms, yet in his foreign policy he was asserting containment of Communism. Perhaps blinded by his political motives of re-election in 1948, he didn't consider how it would look to United Nations that he was advocating singling out a certain group of

people who were not conforming politically to society, especially after Hitler's treatment to the Jewish people. Yet, he had to investigate the rumours of Communism within the federal system, he probably let the witch hunts continue, because he wanted to assure the American citizen's and the world that action was being taken regardless against Communists of whether it was fair or not.

The Taft Hartley Act

Whether Truman believed there was a communist threat within America was unknown, he vetoed the Taft Hartley Act because it went against the National Labor Relations Act which grants employees the right to join or form unions, as well as the Democratic policies- who have historical been supportive to labour workers. Regardless, the Act was passed in June 1947, with the Republican majority in Congress voting to overturn the veto, the act stated the obligation of a full disclosure on political and financial activities of unions. Along with if leaders of unions refused to sign an affidavit with the United States Department of Labor stating they had no affiliations with organisation's ' overthrow of the United States government by force or by any illegal or unconstitutional means', they would be denied the board's services. The fact legislation was passed shows that Congress must have felt the threat of something- but that something was less Communism and more the threat of strikes that were increasingly occurring and damaging America's industry. While a year after the Taft-Hartley Act was passed, 81, 000 union leaders had signed the affidavits this still was not enough for National Labor Relations Board who, like many, doubted that Communists

would confess their affiliations and therefore proceeded with conducting loyalty reviews. This led to many union officials being jailed to informants testifying to their alleged Communist affiliations, the Supreme Court held that the Taft-Hartley Act was an unconstitutional bill of attainder, signifying that the Act was viewed as unfair later on as union officials were being punished without a trial which is something they should be entitled to, showing there was not enough substantial evidence when they were being prosecuted for what they had allegedly done. Anti-Communist feel was intensifying throughout the country, especially after the Berlin blockade Truman's surprising re-election in 1948 reflected on public attitudes to his Communist containment policies

Hollywood

The next area to be smeared with accusations of the red was Hollywood, by the notorious House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), headed by Martin Dies, with the involvement of staunch anti-Communist Republicans such as Richard Nixon. They knew they could not attack the government instantaneously, as it would look like their sole target was the government, so October 20th, 1947 signified the beginnings of perhaps the largest crusade HUAC embarked on, Hollywood. The media was a force of propaganda for actors, writers, and directors to assert their ideas to the public via their creations, especially since the average adult watched television for three hours a day, and children for three, and it is the nature of human beings to be influenced by what they watched, hence posing a threat to America if the ideas presented in what they watch were on the left side of

the spectrum. There was a political bias within Hollywood, many were liberal, due to the nature of World War Two, Fascism, and the high percentage of Jews in the industry, but for HUAC these ideologies were too close to those of Communism. The informers to HUAC, were usually disgruntled rivals, with a personal vendetta for example they led studios who were unwilling to deal with unions such as Walt Disney's (Page 25)- and unions were commonly associated with Communism, this shows, once again, that the examining board were basing their evidence on people who had a personal agenda of taking down the accused, as it would benefit them. The Hollywood Ten were the first victims of this personal vendetta, William Wilkerson published a column naming Communist sympathisers, later his son revealed that Wilkerson was motivated by his personal failed desire to own a studio, this publicised disfigurement of these Hollywood professional's names commanded for the Committee involve themselves and to bring them in for questioning. Many of the accused asserted their First Amendment rights to free speech and were consequently refusing to deny involvement with the Communist Party, this gave reasonable grounds for Congress to approve the accused to be charged with contempt, forming the Hollywood Blacklist. Despite appealing the verdict, the Supreme Court denied certiorari (denied a judicial review) in spite of amicus curiae (a party who offers insight on the case) brief which was signed by 204 Hollywood employees, and the accused began a yearlong prison sentence in 1950. During the hearing the Hollywood Ten were viewed as martyrs, although allies stood by them (the amicus curiae), they gave up soon due to the fear instilled in them by the ruthlessness of HUAC. Film executives saw the potential economic threat of

keeping those on the blacklist employed, and therefore concluded that it would be best to make them redundant- no longer were you hired based on your talent or acting ability, but on your political affiliations or hereby the lack of them. After seeing what had happened to the Hollywood Ten, others who were called into hearings began to plead their Fifth Amendment rights, but nevertheless many of these people were still blacklisted, as it was viewed as avoiding admitting to having communist affiliations, and it was dubbed the “ Fifth Amendment Communist”. The Anti-Communist climate had heightened during these hearings due to the publicity and recognition that HUAC received, in the form of newspapers and political support, majority of people support the to carry on with their hearings, despite the fact it was ruining the reputations and careers of many. This disregard, on the Committee’s behalf, to the American constitution by neglecting the two amendments reflected on how the witch hunts had become a fact of American’s lives by the late 1940’s and early 1950’s.

Alger Hiss’s Case

By early fall 1949, the anti-Communist feeling had intensified throughout America, their status as a world power was slipping away after the Soviets successfully exploded an atomic, America had no military advantage over them, especially as the Soviet army was much larger than America’s. Furthermore, a few weeks later, America saw Mao Zedong’s Communist force take over China, the billions that they had given to the Nationalist government was in vain, and now the majority of Asia was in the hands of the red. This led many to believe there were spies in the American

government, causing this success for the Soviets. Alger Hiss's case remains controversial to this day, he was tried for perjury, based on allegations made from an ex-soviet courier, who claimed in the 1930's while Hiss was working in the State Department he passed classified documents to him, providing the HUAC investigators microfilms of documents that were hidden in hollowed out pumpkins which was unusual. While the evidence was substantial, the credibility of the evidence was overlooked, showing that the HUAC were eager to get him convicted. While the case benefitted the HUAC investigators for example it launched the political career of Richard Nixon, who went on to become president of the United States in 1969, it heightened the public's fear of Soviet espionage. They were baffled as to how someone with such high authority (for Hiss had accompanied President Roosevelt to the Yalta Conference albeit he was one of many, and helped to organise the United Nations), and so well educated could be involved in aiding the Red Menace. After the conviction of Alger Hiss the president signed an order disallowing anyone within the State Department from giving information regarding Communist activities of other employees, giving them protection from the aggressive HUAC, who would remain persistent to root out other "Communists" as they had convicted one.

McCarthy

The inception of the term McCarthyism occurred two weeks after Hiss was convicted during the Wheeling Speech on the 9th of February 1950, by a relatively unknown Senator from Wisconsin- Joseph McCarthy. Little did he know this speech, where he accused 205 people in the State Department for

having Communist affiliations, would make him a national symbol. McCarthy provided an answer to America's big question as to why the enemy was getting stronger- insinuating that the government was protecting and approving what these 205 people in the State Department were doing. McCarthy's numbers changed from 205 to 57, and he cleverly refused to release names based on the order that prevented anyone within the State Department to speak about other employees. McCarthy used the vulnerability created by the Soviet atomic bomb, the stalemate in China, and the recent conviction of Alger Hiss to create a hysteria by making multiple unsupported accusations. High government officials felt pressured to join and support his hunt, in the fear that they would be accused as being "traitors"- as anyone who went against him would be tagged as being a "Communist sympathiser", Republican's allowed him to continue with his methods in hope of a win in the 1952 presidential election because the public would view them as eradicating the nation from Communism. Democrat's believed they had him and set up a 5 man to committee to investigate his allegations, the Republican's in the "Do Nothing Congress" refused to back the Democrats in denouncing McCarthy. Congress continued to refuse to cooperate with the Democrats, in this case the president, when they overturned his veto on The McCarran Internal Security Act, after deciding the loyalty reviews were not sufficient, and made it unlawful to be a part of organisations that promote totalitarian dictatorship of the United States. Truman Vetoed this Act stating, "In a free country, we punish men for the crimes they commit, but never for the opinions they have.". This implies that Truman could see that loyalty reviews were now becoming witch

hunts, especially aggravated by McCarthy and his publicised opinions, and how it was tearing apart the United States. The statistics prove the dramatic effect these witch hunts had on the American workforce, between the years 1947 to 1951 3. 2 employees were investigated, and 212 were sacked, on top of this 2, 900 people resigned as they felt these investigations were unconstitutional.

Conclusion

The crusade that America undertook with purging anti-Communists out, was an immense and sore one. In some respects, there was a genuine fear of Communism prevailing especially when Russia successful released a missile, and when China, the most populous country in the world, was taken over by Communist forces, showing a real threat. But, usually, pursuing Communists was a façade to cover up the individual's real motives, for people like the zealous Richard Nixon, it held political value- by exaggerating the threat he was able to come in the national spotlight as a hero for HUAC after perusing Alger Hiss. For those who were put on the Hollywood Blacklist, it started off as an act jealousy or to get one up on the union's but turned into an unconstitutional fight to somehow convict people based on evidence that was hearsay. Even the president of the United State's Truman seemed to be unsure as to where he stood, on one hand he had political motives from the backlash his administration had received from the Republicans, while on the other hand he vetoed key Acts that persecuted those in favour of the left side of politics, wherever they lied on the spectrum. His act of diplomacy evidently led to the downfall of the Democrats, and the 1952 presidential

election gave the Republican's legislative and executive power- the perfect environment for McCarthyism to thrive, but alas his downfall came 2 years after, implying Republican support was with the motives of winning the election. Throughout the Truman years, people were blinded by the desire and hysteria of catching red- with a disregard to whether it even was Communism or not, and forgot that they were hurting the careers and lives of these victims.