

# Red scare describes assignment

[History](#)



American involvement, nor did they support the subsequent draft. In response to the dissent, Congress passed the Sedition Act (actually, amended the Espionage Act). It was important in relation to the Red Scare because it allowed for censoring of radical literature as well as regulation of the mail. It was directed against subversives and, therefore, cast a very broad net. Because of the Sedition act, many individuals were arrested for distributing media that criticized the American military (Eugene Debs, head of the Socialist Party, was one of them).

It was in response to this act that Justices Oliver Wendell Holmes set forth the "clear and present danger" doctrine and marked the beginning of modern First Amendment jurisprudence. Therefore, the Sedition Act of 1918 was important in the imposition of censorship after World War I. "Reds" were seen as a danger to the American system of government, economic stability, and way of life. In this sense, the war produced an era of intolerance for subversives, and it was this attitude that provided a ripe setting for the Red Scare of 1919 to take place.

The Sedition Act was the legal excuse people used to regulate, censor, prosecute, and deport Americans thought to be radicals. Intolerance during the war would cause Americans to fear immigrants and radicals afterward, and it would only take a little spark to cause full blown hysteria. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia only deepened American's fears because they felt the same thing could happen on their soil. The labor unrest following the end of World War I would prove to be instrumental in igniting the fire that was the Red Scare of 1919.

The years after the war were marked by economic turmoil and labor unrest. At first, laborers expected the good working conditions, a staple of the wartime economy, to continue after the war was over. The economy was in good shape because war time contracts had caused industry to boom. Labor was supported by the government during the war in order to keep production levels high. After the war ended, however, contracts were canceled, which caused rising unemployment, and managers stopped cooperating with labor. Also, the cost of living had risen 99% by 1919 because of inflation.

Without government support, labor unions began to strike in order to recapture the gains they had made during the war. One such strike took place in Seattle and involved sixty thousand workers (Painter, 346). Soon, this strike and others were labeled as a communist effort to undermine the American economy. The cycle of hysteria had begun. Labor unions were seen as Bolshevik sponsored organizations, and union members were labeled as communists. America began to become afraid because they saw their way of life slipping away. This fear would soon turn into action.

The fear of radicalism stemmed, as stated earlier, from the era of intolerance during World War I. Propaganda techniques that once united the American public against Germany and hyphenated Americans during the war were easily converted into an instrument to cast a negative light on Bolsheviks. After all, America was not happy with Russia leaving the war and instituting a form of economy that was directly opposite of capitalism. Bolsheviks, therefore, were seen as a threat to democracy. Likewise, the forming of the

Communist International was seen as an attempt to spread communism throughout the world.

People felt insecure after the war, and this feeling was only bolstered by the idea that communists were working to overthrow the American economy and government. When a series of mail bombs were discovered, one of which exploding at Attorney General Palmers home, they were labeled as a communist effort to undermine America. The Red Scare of 1919 had begun. Labor unions were hardest hit. However, anyone seen as radical was persecuted and labeled a red. Elected officials who were members of the socialist party were dismissed from office.

In fact, the New York State Assembly dismissed five elected socialists. However, the most vivid example of the extent of the scare is illustrated by the Palmer raids, in which six thousand people were arrested and five hundred were deported. There were very few Communists in the United States in 1919, yet Palmer viewed them as a huge threat. Encouraged by Congress, Palmer began a series of showy and well publicized raids against radicals and leftists. Striking without warning and without warrants, Palmers men smashed union offices and the headquarters' of Communist and Socialist organizations.

They concentrated, whenever Seibel, on aliens rather than citizens, because aliens had fewer rights. As quickly as it had began, the Red Scare of 1919 ended. Although the hysteria had subsided, consequences still arose. The scare, as well as the raids, was seen as unproductive. Of the numerous arrests made in association with the scare, only a small percent of the

suspected communists were deported. Therefore, government persecution of subversives only stopped because it was not working as well as hoped, yet the fear and hatred of radicals was still looming in the distance.

It would again resurface in the 1950s during the McCarthy era when another Red Scare, more organized and brutal, would take place. America had learned how to deal with reds, and these lessons would be effectively applied in the next crusade against communism in America. Finally, a more visible and immediate consequence of the Red Scare of 1919 was the mass fear of immigration that took place afterwards. The highly visible raids by Palmer had a deep effect on Americans because the raids exposed the "enemy." Restrictions and quotas were placed on immigration, especially on those people coming from Eastern Europe.

Fear of communists turned into hatred of immigrants, and American citizens would have a hard time accepting new arrivals. In many cases, immigrants were automatically labeled as subversives, anarchists, and communists. The association between immigrants and social upheaval would have a negative effect on American immigrants in the years to come, a fact most vividly portrayed through the trial of Cacao and Vendetta. Also, for many years to come, unions were seen in a negative light. The association of communism with unions would continue to be a hindrance for labor and the advancement of labor reforms.