

Communism during the cold war history essay



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Communism is a system of government in which ownership of property is ascribed to the community. Cohen (4) defines communism as a system of organization in which all social and economic activities are controlled by a totalitarian state dominated a self-perpetuating state. Communism became a major concern of the U. S during the cold war; a period when the U. S was committed to contain domination of Russia in the eastern and central Europe. Although there were only a few American communists in number by then, policy makers in America associated communism with soviet imperialism and therefore made efforts to reduce appeal of communism in the country. Anticommunist movements and leaders including President Harry Truman raised concern over the spread of communism and this in turn posed a threat to national security. This paper focuses on assessing the impact of communism during the cold war to determine if it posed any threat to America.

During the World War II, the alliance between the solvent union and the United States of America led to growth communism in America. However, its tolerance did survive long after victory over Hitler. After the World War II, the emergence of cold war brought the communist party under attack. The cold war shifted the concept of communism from a political perspective to an issue of national security. The assumption that communism threatened national security was primarily based on the ideological conception of the communist movement. According to Schrecker (103), the concern came from the government's effort to mobilize the public opinion for the cold war. However, the definition of the threats that communism posed, had much formulations pursued by anticommunist movement networks. Zeinert (61)

notes that the perception of an internal communist had been distorted and exaggerated enough to convince majority of Americans who had no direct contact with the members or the communist party. More so, this perception dehumanized American communists and legalized the McCarthy Era of oppression.

Members of the communist party were believed to be a section of secret conspiracy and constituted fanatics who the society believed could automatically yield to Stalin's directions. This view carried some reality since the American communist party was a disciplined organization and besides its connections with the Soviet Union, its leaders ensured congruence of its policies with those of the Kremlin. Some communists had Stalinist rigidity and displayed unquestioning devotion Schrecker (103).

According to Schrecker (105), communist behaved in a conspiratorial way by declaring their political affiliations. However, the members did not perceive themselves as secretive and rigid association or as soldiers in the Stalin's army as the society did. Rather, they perceived themselves as radical Americans devoted to bring about social and political change for a better society. According to Fried (149), the fact that the communist party experienced high turnover before and during 1950's proved that its members were not ideological zombies as portrayed.

On the contrary, no one thought that the party members in various positions of responsibilities would mount successful revolutions in the country despite their leaders going to jail in the 1950's. According to (Zeinert, 58), a more solid danger was the possibility of individual communist in high profiled

positions to compromise the nation's ability to defend itself or influence its foreign policies. Though this was not thought of, several conspiracy theories originally circulated by the Republicans, and their allies emerged. These theories blamed communist for penetrating the State Department and influencing FDR to cede Poland to Stalin. This tidbit scenario allowed people like Joe McCarthy to preach false but rather convincing doctrine which managed to sway the views of people.

According to Schrecker (102), J. Edgar Hoover argued that every American communist was potential espionage agent of the Soviet Union. The less powerful communists had less capacity to influence government policies. However, they stole secret. Zeinert (77) notes that this did not present a potential threat to the country. The communist spies presented a genuine threat. There was enough evidence that some British, Canadian and American citizens in the party or near it spied for the Soviet Union for political reasons. Most of these spies had been active during the World War II when United States and Russia were on the same side. During this time, it was unlikely for the Soviet Union to recruit spies since the government had abolished its left wing. For policy makers in the United States, sabotage was their main concern. They feared that operations of the communist led unions would impede the nation's crucial defense industries or lead to strikes. Although the fear was exaggerated, the fear laid grounds for plausibility (Zeinert, 80).

Schrecker (111) notes that although Leather and Fur workers subjected national security to little threats, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine workforce in America was strategically placed. During the Nazi- Soviet

agreement period, leaders from the communist labor union had been involved in a number of largely publicized strikes against the nation's defense force industries. These strikes were driven by unions from all political ends and had been triggered by economic grievances among workers and not an effort to impede the nation's war. However, since the communists had been active before and during this time, these strikes in the initial years of the cold war were cited as evidence of American re-armament sabotage by the communist party. Accordingly, this was used to justify the actions against the communist.

Conclusion

Anti-communism did not derive its power from any doctrinal or ideological qualities. Indeed, it lacked the substance and coherence necessary to be classified as a doctrine or an ideology. It was an allegation which simplified and reduced the complex issues facing the United States, and became an agenda item for adherents of a wide variety of other political doctrines. Thus it became a symbiotic claim that was not necessarily benefit the host. The Communist threat on which anti-communism was based, could not be measured or in some cases, even substantiated and as a result, many of those who feared the threat as well as all of those who stood to benefit from proclaiming the threat, trumpeted their warnings in a highly emotional and attention-getting manner.