

To understand the Red Scare and the Palmer Raids in the United States, you have to understand what happened in Russia before 1920. Russia was ruled by a czar until 1917. Under this system of government a few people were very rich and most of the people were very poor. After Russia began to become industrialized, many of these poor people moved to the cities to find work. Unfortunately, most of them were just as poor in the cities as they had been in the country, but there was one important difference, when they lived in the country there were never very many poor people in one place. When large numbers of them moved to the cities they were able to talk and share ideas. As they did this, many of them began to question why only the very rich people could live comfortable lives, while everyone else had almost nothing. By 1917, workers across Russia were striking for better food rations and more control of the government, and when the military refused to make them stop, the czar was forced to step aside and for several years different groups in Russia fought to determine who would run the country. The czar and his entire family were eventually killed by the revolutionaries.

The two sides in the civil war were the Bolsheviks, who were called the Reds, and the anti-Bolsheviks, who were called the whites. The Bolsheviks were Marxists and mostly workers who believed that they should share part of the profits earned from their work. This civil war lasted until 1920, and when it was over most of Russia was ruined and devastated. The Bolsheviks won and changed everything about Russia. Old marriage and divorce laws were discarded, religion and the church was disapproved of by the government, workers took control of the factories, the banks were taken over by the government, and a supreme economic council was established to run the economy. The council was responsible for running all of the companies since they had been taken over by the government, paying all the workers, deciding what the factories made and how much they produced and how goods were distributed, and controlling all other parts of the economy. The goal of this control was to make sure everyone had a job and a paycheck.

The United States had many people who believed, like the Communists or Marxists, that workers should share in some of a company's profits. There were also large numbers of anarchists who believed that there should be no large central government and that each area should be completely controlled by the people who lived there. Like in Russia, there were large numbers of very poor people living in the cities and working under very bad conditions in the factories. Many of the poorest paid and worst treated people had immigrated to America and most had become United States citizens. Despite this, they were often called foreigners and blamed for bringing new ideas, such as communism and anarchism to America.

When World War I started, many people in America were opposed to America's participation because they said it was a rich man's war, but that it was the poor people's sons who would die. Some of the people who spoke out the loudest were anarchists like Emma Goldman and socialists like Eugene Debs. To keep people from being able to criticize the government and the war Congress passed two laws, the Sedition Act and the Espionage Act. The Espionage Act said people couldn't interfere with the government's recruiting of soldiers, and the Sedition Act said that it was against the law to criticize the government or the Constitution by giving a speech or in writing. Because of these laws, many people went to jail for criticizing the government or speaking out against the war.

By 1919, when President Woodrow Wilson appointed A. Mitchell Palmer as his attorney general, it was clear the Bolsheviks were going to win the civil war in Russia. Palmer became convinced that the Communists were going to try to take over the American government as they had in Russia, and when an Italian anarchist sent bombs to 38 politicians and then blew himself up outside Palmer's home, he began to fear anyone he considered a radical. Palmer

recruited J. Edgar Hoover to be his special assistant and they used the Espionage and Sedition Acts to fight communists, anarchists, labor unions, and many other groups they considered radical or dangerous. Because in Russia, the Bolsheviks were known as the Reds, communists in America were often called Reds as well. For this reason, the fear many people felt concerning the communists and other radical groups became known as the Red Scare. On November 7, 1919, the second anniversary of the Russian Revolution, over 10,000 communists and anarchists were arrested. Although they found no evidence of the revolution these people were supposed to be planning, many were held for a long time without a trial. In January of 1920, another 6,000 people from several cities were arrested and held without trial. These arrests were called the Palmer Raids. About this time Palmer announced that he had evidence the communists in America were going to try to start a revolution and overthrow the United States government on May 1, 1920. This announcement caused panic in many parts of the country.

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