

INDUCED HYSTERIA

The Cold War, Red Scare, & McCarthyism

“Fear doesn’t have to be real to be powerful.” - Matthew Dowd, ABC News

RED SCARE

The term Red Scare is used to describe periods of extreme anti-communism in the United States. "Red" comes from the color of the Soviet Union flag. "Scare" comes from the fact that many people were scared that communism would come to the United States.

There were two Red Scare periods. The first occurred after World War I and the Russian Revolution. The second occurred during the Cold War after World War II.

Communism first became a major system of government in Russia after the Russian Revolution in 1917. The Bolshevik Party that led the revolution was led by Marxist Vladimir Lenin. They overthrew the current government and murdered the royal family. Under communism private ownership was taken away and people were not allowed to openly practice their religion. This type of government rule struck fear in the hearts of many Americans.

The first Red Scare in the US occurred from 1919 to 1920. When workers began to strike, many people blamed communism. A number of people were arrested just because they were thought to have communist beliefs. The government even deported people under the Sedition Act of 1918.

The second Red Scare occurred during the start of the Cold War with the Soviet Union after the end of World War II. It lasted around ten years from 1947 to 1957.

With the spread of communism in Eastern Europe and China as well as the Korean War, people were scared that communism could infiltrate the United States. Also, the Soviet Union had become a world superpower and had nuclear bombs. People were scared of anyone who may side with the communists and help the Soviets get secret information about the United States.

During the 1940's and early 1950's, the with assistance from the FBI and the "Red Squads" of state and local law enforcement agencies, the House on Un-American Activities Committee began holding hearings. Once a witness had answered "yes" to the now famous query, "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" he or she was required to name names, that is, to give the committee other supposed subversives to interrogate. The justification for this requirement was that naming names was the only way a witness could prove for

certain that he or she really had renounced communism. As a congressional investigating committee, HUAC was not subject to the due process requirements of the criminal system. The committee was free to denounce people as communists without producing proof, often costing the accused their jobs. By the mid- 1950's during this Red Scare, it was not uncommon for individuals to be fired merely because they received a subpoena from the HAUC or one of the many similar committees that arose in HUAC's wake.

JOSEPH MCCARTHY

One of the main crusaders against communism was Senator Joseph McCarthy. In 1950, Joseph McCarthy, a republican senator from Wisconsin, was jaded that he



hadn't received another position which he greatly desired. So later, he declared in a speech that he had a list of over two hundred people in the State Department who were members of the American Communist Party. McCarthy stepped into an unstable and fearful environment that was ripe for his agenda, and he took advantage of it. Having been appointed the Chairman of the government Committee on Operations of the Senate, McCarthy spent the next two years investigating government departments and questioning scores of people about their politics. McCarthy was determined to out communists. He, and the government, used intimidation and gossip to get information. He often had little evidence when he accused people of working for the Soviet Union. The FBI, led by strident anti-communist J. Edgar Hoover, also got involved. They used wiretaps and spied on suspected communists giving the information to McCarthy and other anti-communist leaders.

At first, witnesses asserted that McCarthy's and HAUC's questioning violated the First Amendment right to free speech. The U.S Supreme Court denied to rule on this issue, but the court did permit witnesses to assert their Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination. Unfortunately, this protection did not exempt witnesses from having to testify about, and perhaps incriminate *other* people. Those subpoenaed often faced ostracism from

employers and acquaintances, and those who were unwilling to name names found it extremely difficult to find an attorney willing to represent them. Even the “friendly witnesses” who were unwilling to see their careers destroyed for the sake of an organization they may have long since abandoned found themselves in the uncomfortable position of being “informers.” The unfriendly witnesses faced unemployment for themselves and their spouses. They became accustomed to seeing former friends cross the street to avoid an encounter, and their children were often tormented by children at school.

McCarthyism, the term now associated with the hysterical witch-hunt for communists, was a power to be reckoned with in the early 1950s. McCarthy denounced Harry S Truman as being soft on communism, and McCarthy’s campaign was instrumental in the presidential victory of Republican Dwight Eisenhower in 1952. After this, even politicians opposed to McCarthy’s tactics were reluctant to criticize him. McCarthy faced virtually no opposition when he succeeded in having over 30,000 books removed from library shelves because of their alleged ties to communists or communism.

AN END TO MCCARTHYISM

Eventually, McCarthy’s zeal became too much even for his former supporters, but not before he ruined many people’s careers and lives before other leaders in the Congress put an end to his ways. When he announced in 1953, that the Secretary of the Army was uncooperative with his committee’s attempts to discover communists in the military, Dwight Eisenhower instructed his vice president, Richard Nixon, to begin discrediting McCarthy. Nixon began referring in his speeches to the danger posed by those who engaged in “reckless talk” and used “questionable methods.” Journalists began to attack McCarthy, especially after the widely-viewed televised

Army McCarthy hearings gave the public a glimpse of McCarthy’s bullying tactics and clearly showed the extent of his malice. From that point on, McCarthy’s power diminished to virtually nothing, and in 1954, the Senate passed a motion condemning his conduct by a vote of 67-22. At age 48, Senator Joseph McCarthy succumbed to illness exacerbated by alcoholism and passed away.

THE AFTERMATH

McCarthyism had many detrimental effects on people. It is difficult to estimate the number of victims of



McCarthyism. The number imprisoned is in the hundreds, and some ten or twelve thousand lost their jobs. In many cases simply being subpoenaed by HUAC or one of the other committees was sufficient cause to be fired. Many hard-working citizens had lost their jobs because they were labeled as “Communists.” Many even failed to convince everyone that they were in fact innocent.

McCarthyism also had a huge effect on the psychological aspect of life. Innocent people had to go through the trauma of being prosecuted by their own country. Relationships were destroyed because one could never know who to trust.

The children of the accused were victims as well. Their peers at school were often told by their parents to stay away from them.

Finally, McCarthyism stifled progress and individual expression. The witch-hunting of the 1950’s forced many leftists to go underground. It discouraged people from proposing reforms because doing so would mean persecution by the government.

Although McCarthy himself was gone, the death of McCarthyism took much longer and complete retribution for the victims and affected was never fully made.