



COLD WAR CONCERNS ABOUT COMMUNISM

Following World War II (1939-45), the democratic United States and the communist Soviet Union became engaged in a series of largely political and economic clashes known as the Cold War. The intense rivalry between the two superpowers raised concerns in the United States that Communists and leftist sympathizers inside America might actively work as Soviet spies and pose a threat to U.S. security.

Such ideas were not totally unfounded. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had long carried out espionage activities inside America with the aid of U.S. citizens, particularly during World War II. As apprehension about Soviet influence grew as the Cold War heated up, U.S. leaders decided to take action. On March 21, 1947, President Harry S. Truman (1884-1972) issued Executive Order 9835, also known as the Loyalty Order, which mandated that all federal employees be analyzed to determine whether they were sufficiently loyal to the government. Truman's loyalty program was a startling development for a country that prized the concepts of personal liberty and freedom of political organization. Yet it was only one of many questionable activities that occurred during the period of anticommunist hysteria known as the Red Scare.

PROBING RED INFLUENCE

One of the pioneering efforts to investigate communist activities took place in the U.S. House of Representatives, where the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was formed in 1938. HUAC's investigations frequently focused on exposing Communists working inside the federal government or subversive elements working in the Hollywood film industry, and the committee gained new momentum following World War II, as the Cold War began. Under pressure from the negative publicity aimed at their studios, movie

executives created blacklists that barred suspected radicals from employment; similar lists were also established in other industries.

Another congressional investigator, U.S. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (1908-57) of Wisconsin, became the person most closely associated with the anticommunist crusade—and with its excesses. McCarthy used hearsay and intimidation to establish himself as a powerful and feared figure in American politics. He leveled charges of disloyalty at celebrities, intellectuals and anyone who disagreed with his political views, costing many of his victims their reputations and jobs. McCarthy's reign of terror continued until his colleagues formally denounced his tactics in 1954.

The information obtained by the FBI proved essential in high-profile legal cases, including the 1949 conviction of 12 prominent leaders of the American Communist Party on charges that they had advocated the overthrow of the government. Moreover, the agents helped build the case against Julius Rosenberg and his wife, Ethel Rosenberg, who were convicted of espionage in 1951 and executed two years later.

HYSTERIA

Americans felt the effects of the Red Scare on a personal level, and thousands of alleged communist sympathizers saw their lives disrupted. They were hounded by law enforcement, alienated from friends and family and fired from their jobs. While a small number of the accused may have been aspiring revolutionaries, most others were the victims of false allegations or had done nothing more than exercise their democratic right to join a political party.