
Deporting a Political Party: An Editorial in *The New Republic*, January 14, 1920.

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When the Imperial Japanese Government, some years ago, made wholesale arrests of Socialist leaders, on the ground that their activities were against the interests of the government, Americans, however much they might dislike the Socialists, were proud of the fact that in this country such proceedings would never be countenanced. That Bismarckian anti-socialist laws were as futile as they were ethically indefensible, was one of the axioms of political wisdom inculcated in our colleges, and proclaimed in Congress and on the platform. Even today it is one of the most telling counts in the popular indictment of Soviet Russia, that it has suppressed independent newspapers which dared agitate against the Soviet government and Soviet constitution.

Here in the United States, so we had believed, such methods were abhorrent to that “fierce spirit of liberty” which Burke once proclaimed as America’s chief characteristic. In the United States, government rests on the consent of the governed, not on arbitrary power. American institutions are secure because the great majority of the people believe in them, not because a few public officials maintain them by force. If a minority does not believe in American institutions, let them hire a hall and vent their opinions until they are hoarse. Let them work their printing presses to their hearts’ content, so long as they do not counsel crime or directly instigate violence. Since the overwhelm-

ing majority of the people believe in American institutions, and in orderly and democratic progress, the fulmination of a discontented minority will fall on deaf ears. It may, perhaps, perform the useful function of calling our attention to existing grievances, but it can accomplish its objects only if it can convince a large number of safe and sane Americans that their accustomed institutions are iniquitous. It has always been a part of our faith that such an attempt would never succeed.

Yet today, when England, France, Italy, even Germany, permit independent socialists, communists, and Bolshevik sympathizers to carry on orderly propaganda, to organize parties, and to participate in political campaigns, the United States, led by Mr. [Mitchell] Palmer, has let itself be frightened into a fantastic attempt to annihilate a radical political minority by imprisonment and deportation. That is what Mr. Palmer’s nationwide raids mean, nothing less. There is no pretense that the few thousand victims of the roundup had counselled crime or instigated violence. Even the anonymous suggestions of nearby revolution were so utterly silly that even Mr. Palmer cannot have taken them seriously. The men and women who were arrested were charged simply and solely with being members of the Communist or Communist Labor Parties. Adherence to the platform of these parties, publicly adopted in open conven-

†- The editorial board of *The New Republic* at this time consisted of Herbert Croly, Francis Hackett, Alvin Johnson, Charles Merz, Walter Lippmann, and Philip Littell.

tion a few months ago, was deemed sufficient to warrant deportation and imprisonment.

The platform of the Communist Party has now, thanks to Mr. Palmer, been published in whole or in part in all the leading newspapers of the country. Fortunately the new sedition law has not yet been enacted by Congress, or Mr. Palmer might find himself, together with some very respectable newspapers, liable to prosecution for circulating seditious matter. We can take advantage of the period of temporary immunity, however, to examine the published extracts which Mr. Palmer considers so menacing to American institutions. The Communist Party proclaims itself to be “the party of the working class,” and proposes to “end capitalism and organize a workers’ industrial republic.” It claims to be the “conscious expression of the class struggle of the workers against capitalism.” “Its aim is to direct this struggle to the conquest of political power, the overthrow of capitalism and the destruction of the bourgeois state,” and more to the same effect, obviously culled from the historic literature of Marxian socialism. If Mr. Palmer were a student of contemporary social thought he would know that bombastic pronouncements of this sort, cast in the

jargon of “scientific” socialism, have been circulated in Europe since 1848, and in this country for nearly half a century, without disturbing anyone. If he had any common sense, he would recognize the absurdity of believing that a few thousand uneducated fanatics, armed with the ancient Marxian dogmas, could actually imperil our institutions, or make any appreciable progress toward the “establishment of a Soviet form of government, similar to that which now obtains in Russia.”

Mr. Palmer believes that he has “broken the back” of the Communist movement in the United States. We venture to say that he has given it an enormous impetus. He has not only given its principles and its literature a publicity which a propaganda fund of a million dollars could not have achieved, but he has done his best to verify the premise upon which the appeal of the Communist Party mainly rests. The Communist believes that the present government does not rest on the consent of the governed, and that it is only by the forcible suppression of radical criticism that it protects itself against violent overthrow. The belief, of course, is absurd, but Mr. Palmer has shown by word and deed that he shares it.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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