The Second Red Scare & the Eisenhower Administration

As in the post-World War I era, the United States in the years following World War II was convulsed by fear of widespread Communist infiltration. In the latter period, however, there was greater justification for believing in the existence of Communist subversion, prompting the American people themselves to be more receptive to taking drastic measures against anyone suspected of it.

It had been fashionable among folks associated with the arts and with Democratic Party politics and civil service during the late 20s and 30s to flirt with Communism. Some people had even joined the American Communist Party or a so-called "Communist front organization" in the 30s and 40s. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and declassification of some of the Soviet archives, we now know that some of these organizations were run by the Soviet government when Stalin was in power, and some (a very few) American members of these organization were used to gain intelligence for the Soviets. After World War II, it very suddenly, became *very unfashionable* to have, or to have had, anything to do with Communism! A great many Americans found themselves in trouble.

TRUMAN'S EXECUTIVE ORDER

As postwar relations between the United States and the Soviet Union rapidly deteriorated, the American people became increasingly suspicious that there were employees within the government who were betraying the nation to the Soviet Union. In 1947, in an effort to ferret out Communists, Truman issued an executive order inaugurating a comprehensive investigation of the loyalty of all federal employees. By the end of the probe, which lasted four years, over 3 million government employees had been cleared, approximately 2,000 had resigned, and 212 had been dismissed on the basis of a reasonable doubt as to their loyalty. Further, in what were described as "sensitive" areas of government, Truman consented to the dismissal of persons who were deemed to be not disloyal but-for one reason or another-security risks. The execution of Truman's loyalty probe was severe and thorough. However, this did not prevent the Republican party from exploiting the issue of Communists in government through allegations that the Truman administration was too "soft" on Communist infiltrators.

THE HISS CASE

In 1948 Whittaker Chambers, an editor of Time magazine, while giving evidence regarding a Communist cell to which he had belonged in the 1930s, named as a fellow member Alger Hiss, a former official in the Department of State. Chambers admitted to having been a messenger for the Soviet espionage system, asserting that Hiss had passed on to him State Department classified documents. Hiss denied this charge under oath before a federal grand jury. After Chambers produced evidence to corroborate his charge, Hiss was found guilty of perjury and sentenced to five years in prison.

THE ROSENBERG CASE

With the public already alarmed by the Hiss case, another episode took place that lent some credence to the wildest charges of Communist infiltration. In 1950 Klaus Fuchs, a

naturalized British physicist engaged in atomic research during World War II, confessed that he had supplied the Soviet Union with data on the making of the atomic bomb. Fuchs provided information that led to the arrest of his accomplices in the United States. Julius Rosenberg, a civilian employee in the United States Army Signal Corps during World War II, and his wife Ethel were arrested and tried for passing information on atomic weapons, as well as standard military equipment, to Soviet agents. The Rosenbergs were found guilty and executed in the electric chair. Three other Americans were convicted of being members of this atomic spy ring and received long prison terms.

For years, the Rosenberg case provoked spirited debate. Many liberals argued, as the *New York Times* still does, that Julius and Ethyl were unfortunate innocent souls, caught up in the "injustice that can be done when a nation gets caught up in hysteria." Conservatives and even some liberals argued that they got what they deserved. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, we have learned that the Rosenbergs were not innocent. They, and their fellows, had provided the Soviets with a great deal of information about nuclear weapons and gave it to the Russians. Acquisition of this top Secret information allowed the U.S.S.R. to become a nuclear power very rapidly. So, it appears that the Rosenbergs were not so innocent after all.

THE TRIAL OF COMMUNIST LEADERS

The Alien Registration Act of 1940, called the Smith Act after its congressional sponsor, among other things, declared it illegal to advocate the overthrow of the United States government by force or to belong to a group dedicated to that end. Put aside during World War II when the United States and the Soviet Union were allied against a common enemy, the act was made use of during the postwar period of American-Soviet tensions. In 1949 a dozen leaders of the American Communist party, including national chairman William Foster and national secretary Eugene Dennis, were indicted for violating the Smith Act provisions on subversive activities. Because of ill health Foster did not go on trial, but before the year was over the eleven others were tried, found guilty, and sent to prison.

THE MCCARRAN ACT

Determined to strike at Communism even harder, Congress in 1950 overrode Truman's veto to pass the Internal Security Act. Known as the McCarran Act after its sponsor, Democratic Senator Pat McCarran of Nevada, it required the registration of Communist and Communist-front organizations, compelled the internment of Communists during declared national emergencies, and prohibited the employment of Communists in defense work. The McCarran Act also contained a provision forbidding immigration to the United States of anyone who had been a member of a totalitarian organization. This was amended in 1951 to permit exceptions for those who had been forced to belong to such groups.

THE McCARRAN-WALTER ACT

In 1952 Congress passed over Truman's veto an act sponsored by Senator McCarran and Republican Representative Frances E. Walter of Pennsylvania that revised existing statutes on immigration and naturalization. The McCarran-Walter Act retained from the Quota Act of 1924 the quota system that favored immigration from northern and western

European countries and repealed that portion of the Quota Act that prohibited the immigration and naturalization of people from Asia.

The new act gave preferential treatment to would-be immigrants who possessed occupational skills deemed useful to American society or the economy and to relatives of American citizens. The act barred entry into the United States of anyone who had been a member of a Communist or Communist-front organization, and it provided for the deportation of any immigrant or naturalized citizen who, once in the United States, participated in a Communist or Communist-front organization.

McCarthyism

There were many politicians who exploited the deep anti-Communist feeling in the nation, but no one did so with such vehemence and initial success as Republican Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin. And because of his activities his name entered the English language. The term McCarthyism soon came to denote the making of indiscriminate and unsubstantiated charges of subversive activities.

TilE SENATOR AND HIS TACTICS. McCarthy first achieved national prominence when he charged in a speech delivered in West Virginia in February, 1950, that he had in his possession a list of "card-carrying" Communists in the State Department. But he was never able to prove his case. Over the next few years he alleged that a number of government agencies were infiltrated by Communists, Communist sympathizers, and "security risks." Anyone who took issue with him he characterized as disloyal or obtuse. He charged with treasonable conduct such persons as General George C. Marshall and Secretary of State Dean Acheson.

THE McCARTHY-ARMY DISPUTE. In 1954 the army accused McCarthy of attempting to obtain preferential treatment for an assistant who had been drafted. McCarthy, who chaired both the Senate Committee on Government Operations and its permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, countered that the army was trying to embarrass him for his investigations of spying at Army Signal Corps facilities at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. During April-June, 1954, televised hearings were held on the two sets of charges. In many confrontations with army counsel Joseph B. Welch, McCarthy's bullying methods were revealed to an estimated 20 million American viewers, with the result that the senator's reputation among his supporters was severely damaged.

CONDEMNATION BY THE SENATE. The public exposure during the hearings of McCarthy's long-standing methods convinced the Senate to take action. In December, 1954, the upper house by a vote of67 to 22 decided to "condemn" his conduct as "unbecoming a member of the United States Senate." His influence was precipitately destroyed.

Entertainment Blacklisting

Between 1947 and 1957, a series of investigations took place to determine who in the American entertainment industry was a communist and to deprive them of work. Those who were considered Communists of "fellow travelers," were blacklisted. Lists were circulated throughout the entertainment industry and folks on the list were not allowed to work in the industry. The most famous of these lists was the "Hollywood Blacklist," which contained the names of actors and actresses, screenwriters, directors and others who were accused of having been members of the Communist Party or some related

organization at one time or other. The House UnAmerican Activities Committee held a number of hearings in Hollywood exposing past "Communists and fellow travelers" in the industry. Once exposed, victims were badgered until they gave the names of others who they knew to be, or suspected were Communists. Those who would not comply with the Committee were jailed for contempt.

Several hundred people involved in the entertainment industry were blacklisted. First, blacklisted writers and others were hired secretly by the studio management that appreciated their talent and didn't want them to go without work. Gradually the industry began to hire blacklisted artists and actors in protest against the government and other agencies that promoted the blacklists.

EISENHOWER AND MODERATE REPUBLICANISM

In 1953, after twenty years of rule by Democrats, the nation had a Republican Chief Executive. However, the new President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, disappointed those conservative members of his party who wanted a frontal attack on the remnants of Roosevelt's New Deal and Truman's Fair Deal. The moderates of both major parties at the time of the Eisenhower administration accepted the principle that the federal government as a welfare state. The aura of the Great Depression, New Deal and FDR had not yet tarnished to the extent that Republicans were willing or able to return to the laissez faire capitalism of the pre-New-Deal American past.

Election of 1952 — "Time for a change" proved to be an effective slogan for the Republican party. And perhaps it was time for a change. The Democratic Party had dominated the American political scene for 20 years, through depression and war, and new policies and new ideas, new ways of thinking were needed to guide the nation through both prosperity and the new Cold War relations of post-war America. I should point out that both Democrats and Republicans were convinced "cold warriors," that is neither party had a very different take on the central issues of the Truman Doctrine and the "containment" of Communism in the world, and both parties were dedicated to the destruction of all traces of Communism in the United States.

DEMOCRATS —The Democratic national convention was wide open because Truman refused to become a candidate, thus there was a host of contenders. On the third ballot the nomination went to Stevenson, who insisted that he was being drafted. For second place on the ticket the convention named Senator John J. Sparkman of Alabama, hoping thus to overcome the disaffection of some of the southern Democratic leaders.

REPUBLICANS — By the time the Republican national convention began its proceedings, there were two front-runners for the presidential nomination: General Dwight D. Eisenhower (who had just relinquished his position as Supreme Commander of NATO) and Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio. The former was supported by the party's liberal and internationalist wing; the latter was the candidate of the more conservative and isolationist "Old Guard" Republicans. After a spirited revolt of many delegates against the Taft supporters, who seemed to have control of the convention committees, the convention gave a first-ballot nomination to Eisenhower. Selected to be his running mate was Senator Richard M. Nixon of California, who was presented as a fighter against Communist infiltration in the civil service.

THE CAMPAIGN — Governor Stevenson, with his rare philosophical and literary skill, tried to convince the voters that the nation was threatened by poverty at home and tyranny and war abroad, and that the struggles against those menaces were costly but necessary. But Stevenson had two real problems:

- ★ he could not overcome the personal popularity of General Eisenhower, perhaps the most beloved and respected U.S. commanders of World War II;
- ★ most Americans had become tired of the New Deal class conflict rhetoric, especially i the face of increasingly improving economic prosperity. Unemployment was low so most Americans believed that the answer to poverty was hard work.

Perhaps the most effective piece of oratory of the campaign was Eisenhower's simple promise regarding the war that for years had been going on in Asia between United Nations and Communist forces: "I will go to Korea." The American people hoped he could thus end the armed conflict.

EISENHOWER'S VICTORY — Eisenhower received 33,936,000 popular and 442 electoral votes to Stevenson's 27,314,000 popular and 89 electoral votes. However, the size of this victory did not carry over to the congressional vote. The Republicans won control of the House of Representatives, but only by a slim margin; the Republican margin in the Senate was dependent upon liberal Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon, who had supported Stevenson in the election as an "Independent Republican." To have his legislative program passed by Congress, Eisenhower would thus be compelled to solicit support from conservative and even moderate Democrats as well as Republicans.

THE PRESIDENT — Eisenhower was a sincere, unpretentious, and kind man. His winning smile topped off an affable manner. He did not possess the gift of eloquence. Finding partisan conflict distasteful, he made a conscious effort to shun it, thus appearing to be "above" politics.

THE CABINET — It was clear from the beginning that the Eisenhower cabinet was industrially and commercially oriented. More than half the appointees were businessmen. Chosen Secretary of State was John Foster Dulles, a New York lawyer who had been a consultant on foreign affairs to the Truman administration. George M. Humphrey, head of an Ohio-based firm with extensive interests in shipping and steel, became secretary of the treasury. Charles E. Wilson, president of General Motors Corporation, was named secretary of defense. In the conduct of American foreign affairs Eisenhower permitted Dulles more control than had been exercised by any previous secretary of state.

Government Reorganization and Reform

The Eisenhower administration made a commitment to continue the work of government reorganization and reform that had been successfully started by the preceding administration.

THE SECOND HOOVER COMMISSION — In 1953 Congress authorized the establishment of the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government. Known as the Second Hoover Commission after its chairman, former President Herbert Hoover, it was charged with proposing methods to streamline the

structure of the executive branch, a task similar to that of the 1947 Hoover Commission. Most of the commission's recommendations were approved by Congress.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE — In 1947 President Truman's proposal for the establishment of a department of welfare to coordinate government-sponsored social programs was defeated by a coalition of congressional conservatives. A few years later the legislative branch took positive action. In 1953 Congress created the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the head of which would be a cabinet member. The new department was established to consolidate and supervise the various government agencies that dealt with the health, education, and social and economic welfare of the American people. Appointed by Eisenhower as the first secretary of health, education, and welfare was Oveta Culp Hobby, who had commanded the Women's Army Corps during World War II.

Summation of Eisenhower's Presidency

Eisenhower was a consummate Cold warrior like his predecessor, Harry Truman, and his successor, John F. Kennedy. But he believed in a different kind of fairness when it came to the rights of Americans than Truman. During Eisenhower's presidency the Red Scare gradually declined. Eisenhower himself was most likely involved in the decline of Joe McCathy. Eisenhower had stated in the mid 50s that he disliked McCarthy's methods.

"Ike" as he was affectionately known to Americans, presided over a period of prosperity and American business expansion that was a welcome relief after the poverty of the Depression and the forced rationing of World War II. His foreign policy was largely negative and defensive, focused on containing Communism and protecting small, new states, like Israel, from larger belligerent neighbors. His greatest asset in maturing the Truman Doctrine was John Foster Dulles.

Eisenhower was also the president responsible to the beginnings of federal intervention in any meaningful way in the treatment of black Americans. In October, 1942, Eisenhower declared that racial discrimination was a national security issue, a declaration that opened the subject up to scrutiny by the Justice Department as it never had been in a positive way before. During Eisenhower's presidency, and with the support of the White House, the American Civil Rights movement began in earnest. the day after the Supreme Court handed down its landmark decision on desegregation in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Eisenhower upon Congress to integrate Washing, D.C. schools. He also signed into law the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960, laws that were passed *in spite* of democratic Party protest and filibusters.