

If you ain't been called a red - Carsie Blanton

PEOPLES SCHOOL FOR MARXIST-LENINIST STUDIES™



Civil Rights Congress Presents: Smith Act, HUAC, and McCarthyism

PSMLS 11/03/26

What we'll be learning today:

- The Smith Act and HUAC
- The Second Red Scare; McCarthy Paves the Way for Fascism
- The "Red Scares" of Today, Third Wave Affects



The Smith Act and HUAC

The Smith Act: Jailing Americans for Their Beliefs

In the words of Scott Martelle, author of a recent book on the Smith Act and the Smith Act trials:

“It was a rather dark time for civil liberties. The Smith Act arose in the late 1930s as conservatives, fearing everything from hidden Bolsheviks to fifth column fascists to homegrown union organizers with a leftist tilt, pushed for laws that would isolate people who held such beliefs. The 1940 Smith Act, among other things, made it illegal to advocate for the necessity of overthrowing the U.S. government. Not for trying to overthrow it, but for saying that it would be a good thing to do. It was facially unconstitutional, but in that climate of fear, it was enacted.”



A group of American Communists, following their release on bail, July 1948. They are facing charges of conspiring to preach the overthrow of the government, under the Smith Act. In the foreground, Eugene V. Dennis (left) listens to William Z. Foster.

Communist Leaders on Trial

The (defendants charged under the Smith Act) were the overt leaders of the Communist Party in the United States, and they were charged under the Smith Act with advocating the necessity of the overthrow of the U.S. government. The accusation hung on the argument that these folks were communists, and communism called for the violent overthrow of capitalism, ergo the communists were urging the overthrow of the U.S. government. William Z. Foster was the head of the party and the lead defendants, but his poor health led the courts to separate out his case from the other 11 defendants, and Eugene V. Dennis became the first name in the case. Dennis was the party's general secretary and a longtime activist within Comintern. Other defendants included Gus Hall of Ohio, who went on to run for president three or four times on the Communist Party line; Benjamin Davis Jr., at the time of the indictment a sitting member of the New York City Council as a communist, which was a rarity; John Gates, a Lincoln Brigade survivor; Gil Green, an activist from Chicago, and others of that stripe. None of them were underground; they all were open communists, running for office, holding public meetings, etc. It would be as if the federal government decided today to target the Green Party

The Smith Act is De-fanged

(The Smith Act) was used several times (to bring charges against Americans), but was short-lived. The Dennis defendants were convicted in 1949 and the Supreme Court upheld the convictions in 1951, after which a series of indictments were handed up around the nation. It didn't take long for the scope of the error of the Supreme Court's decision (to initially uphold the Smith Act) to become apparent. These men were convicted based on their beliefs, their libraries, and courses they taught. In a subsequent case, Yates v. United States [1957], the court, under a new chief justice, gutted the Dennis decision by ruling that the Smith Act could not ban people from talking revolution.



The Committee of Political Persecution



The House Un-American Activities Committee, encouraged by rabid right-wing senator Joseph McCarthy, was supposedly created to hunt for communist activity in the film industry. This campaign, encouraged by Republicans and Democrats alike, was perhaps the most reprehensible aspect of America's Cold War at home. If it had been persecution of card-carrying Communists alone, HUAC's offensive would have been an intolerable violation of political freedoms. But in practice, HUAC, along with other right-wing institutions of state and civil society, was exploiting geopolitical fears of the Soviet Union to crack down on all socialist and socialist-ic thought in the US, communist or otherwise.

The Right-wing Crackdown and the Blacklist

In 1947, for, Walt Disney (who, despite his cuddly image, was a politically vile individual with strong fascist tendencies who allied himself closely with HUAC) issued a pamphlet to Hollywood producers telling them: "Don't smear the free-enterprise system... Don't smear industrialists... Don't smear wealth... Don't smear the profit motive... Don't deify the 'common man'... Don't glorify the collective." For Disney, these principles were 'communistic touches', but they could equally be called virtues of most on the Left. Progressive beliefs, then, not just the Communist Party, were HUAC's target. Wealthy film bosses saw HUAC's attack as an opportunity to crackdown on their Leftist employees. They began to blacklist actors, writers, and cartoonists who were even remotely suspected of communist sympathies.



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Right: Anti-communist Literature from the 1950s

The Committee of Political Persecution

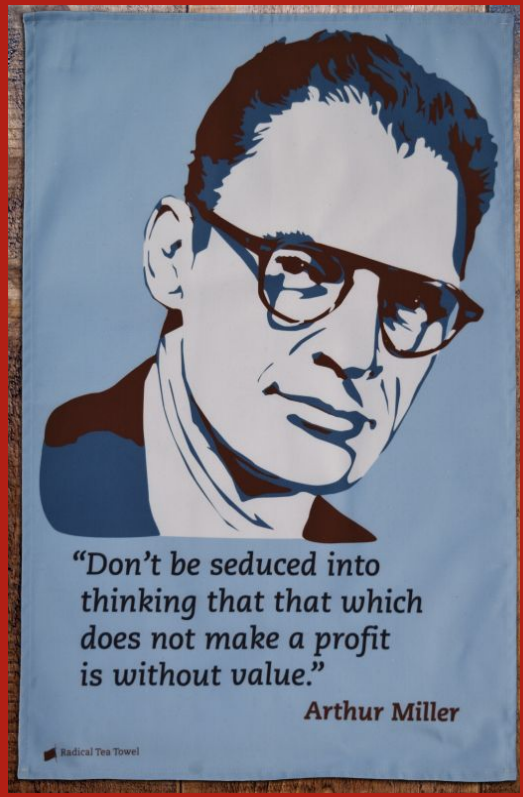


Dalton Trumbo (fourth from left) surrounded by supporters as he waits to board an airplane on his way to federal prison in 1950 for refusing to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

The Committee got to work quickly. In October 1947, when the Cold War had hardly begun, it produced a witness list of 43 Hollywood figures it decided were relevant to the investigation of communist infiltration of the industry. Of those on the list, 19 immediately refused to give evidence if summoned because the whole exercise was a violation of their First Amendment right to free speech and thought. 11 of these objectors were eventually summoned by HUAC. Bertolt Brecht, the émigré German playwright, soon after agreed to speak to the Committee, which left ten in open defiance. These guys - among them the famous Spartacus screenwriter, Dalton Trumbo - became the 'Hollywood Ten'. They were charged with 'Contempt of Congress' and sentenced to year-long prison sentences.

The Committee of Political Persecution

With this level of pressure on their livelihoods, many in Hollywood regrettably began to cave in. In 1952, for example, the director Elia Kazan named eight fellow members of the 'Group Theatre' collective as having been fellow members of the Communist Party. This move cost Kazan his long friendship with Arthur Miller, who was inspired by the episode to write 'The Crucible', which drew an analogy between the ongoing persecution of the US Left with the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. Miller himself was called before HUAC in 1956. He refused to name communists, saying "I could not use the name of another person and bring trouble on him." Miller was then convicted for Contempt of Congress before fortunately having this overturned in 1958.



Right: Arthur Miller - The Playwright Who Defied HUAC

Paul Robeson Testifying at the House Un-American Activities Committee





Discussion & New Members Introductions

New Member Introductions

- What is your name, pronouns and state (or country/territory)?
- Where do you work? Is it unionized?
- How did you find out about the People’s School?
- What do you think about tonight's class?



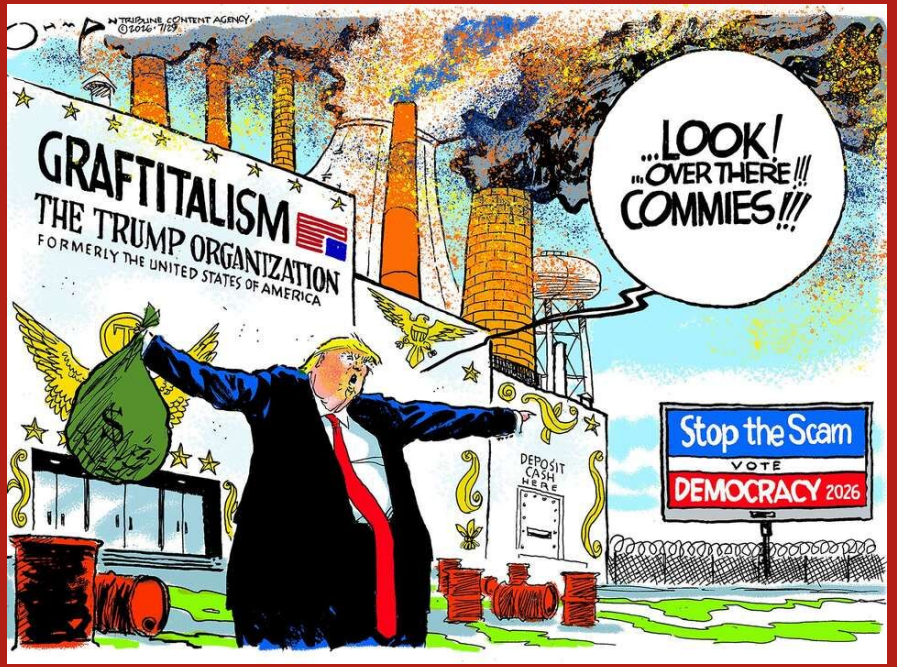
The Second Red Scare; McCarthy Paves the Way for Fascism

The Second Red Scare

The Second Red Scare, (McCarthyism) occurred during the late 1940s through the 1950s following World War 2.

During that era The United States and Soviet Union had acquired nuclear weapons just as the Chinese civil war concluded in 1949 and the Korean War ensued in 1950.

Paranoia rose at the behest of Senator **Joseph McCarthy** (R. WI) and the House Un American Activities Committee. These separate entities investigated alleged communist subversion, attracting national attention for targeting members of the film industry and creating a blacklist to threaten the jobs and reputations of the accused. During this time, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover expanded surveillance of American citizens and supported loyalty programs for federal employees.



The Red Scare, Social Conditions

The social conditions during the American Red Scares apparent during both periods from the post-World War I era (1917–1920) and the McCarthy era (1947–1954)—were times of existential dread, deep seated mistrust, suspensions of civil rights and disturbances of daily routine for ordinary people and communities.

The social milieu of the Red Scare periods were characterized by greatly lowered social trust in community, compensated for by increased reliance on authorities and deferment of autonomy to state held powers.

Dissent was equated to treason and loyalty oaths to authority of the state were used to ward of suspicion merely in order to conduct one's daily life.

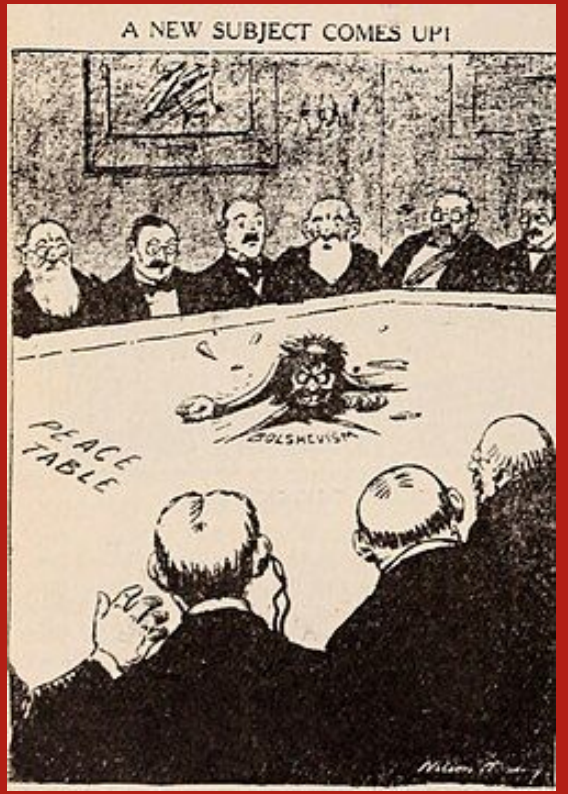


Social Conditions, Livelihood and Liberty

Professions and social bonds were held hostage to the public declarations of loyal to the nation. Citizens risked both should they violate the constantly updated standards of normative political opinion throughout public and private spheres of daily living.

Blacklists and accusations separated friends and fellows as well as person from profession. Employees of state, local and federal governments were forced to prove and reprove their obedience and submission to as yet before unseen standards of submission to their employer.

Civil liberties suffered frequent attack and were censored. Warrants permitting the search of peoples property and persons were dispensed with under loosened legal standards of protection on individuals versus the state, as evidenced by the Palmer Raids arrests and deportations such as Emma Goldman's during the First Red Scare.

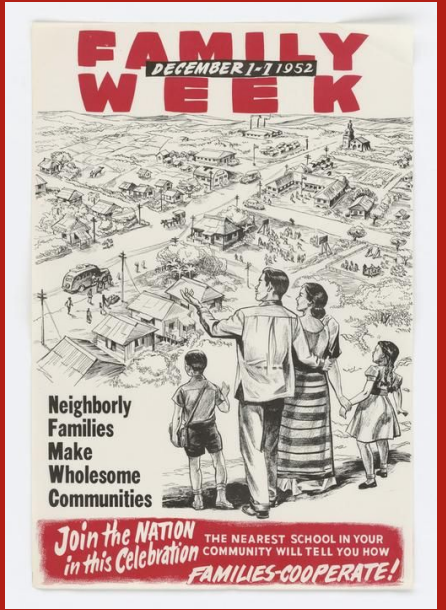


Mass Media and Character Assassination

Artistic standards descended to the serve an emaciated status quo. So deemed controversial materials, once so labeled became beacons to lure red baited dissenters into the increasingly penetrating scrutiny of the state.

The public life during these periods was substantially threatened due to the emergence of mass media outlets, such as radio and television. Mass media communication facilitated a vastly expanded risk to lives and livelihoods by way of association. Trial by media became the new standard, replacing due process with the court of public opinion.

Ostracization and social abandonment became a popular means of punishment in these periods before institutions of fellowship, family, co-worker and neighbor had time to develop defenses against increasingly salient means of public shaming by increasingly centralized authorities. Authorities held on to power with little to stop them, as these social conditions were premised in the assumption that official power, once granted must not be questioned.



The Second Red Scare (cont.)

President Eisenhower chose not to confront Senator Joe McCarthy directly, in order to avoid appearing soft on communism during the height of anti-communist fervor as well as to avoid unnecessarily associating with McCarthy, whose reputation was always questionable.

Following the second Red Scare, extremist groups on the American political right arose to carry McCarthy's torch and continued with scapegoating the American left.

Propelled forward by the anti communist sentiments established by McCarthy, groups like the John Birch Society (JBS) , still in existence today, represented the extremists next door, while McCarthyite extremists in public office, used those offices and command over media attention to generate anti communist hysteria from above the people.



Joseph McCarthy

McCarthy attended Marquette law school and was admitted to the Wisconsin bar in 1935 initiating his law career in Wisconsin and supplementing his income on the side, by gambling. He had a reputation for being serially irresponsible, grandiose, inefficient and for alcohol abuse.

McCarthy was born in Grand chute, WI. McCarthy entered World War 2 joining the United States Marine Corps despite the fact that his holding judicial office exempted him from service. His education qualified him for a direct commission as a First Lieutenant. McCarthy served as an intelligence briefing officer for a dive bombers squadron in the Pacific Theatre.

McCarthy was a registered Democrat until he ran for the US Senate in 1946 as a Republican to oppose the incumbent Robert M La Follette Jr., prevailing over the Democratic candidate in a 61% to 37% margin.



McCarthy's Goal: Moral Panic

McCarthy claimed in a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, that 57 communists had infiltrated the State Department, adding:

"One thing to remember in discussing the Communists in our government is that we are not dealing with spies who get thirty pieces of silver to steal the blueprints of a new weapon. We are dealing with a far more sinister type of activity because it permits the enemy to guide and shape our policy."

After McCarthy's reelection in 1952, he obtained the chairmanship of the Committee on Government Operations of the Senate and of its Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.

For the next two years he was constantly in the spotlight, investigating various government departments and questioning innumerable witnesses about their suspected communist affiliations. Although **he failed to make a plausible case against anyone**, his colourful and cleverly presented accusations drove some persons out of their jobs and brought popular condemnation to others.

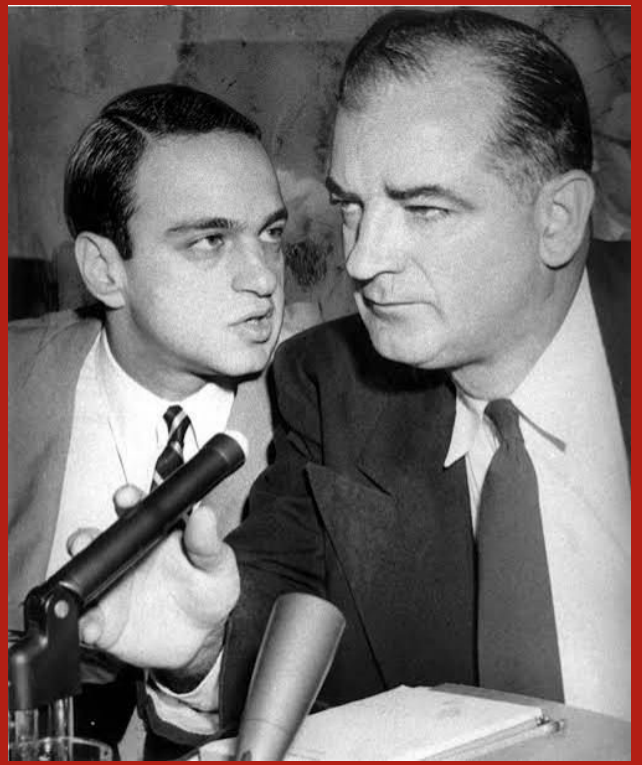


McCarthy Appoints Roy Cohn

McCarthy was an unknown until drumming up national attention for making audacious allegations that the US State Department has been infiltrated by a communist spy ring. He had appointed then 26 year old Roy Cohn as chief counsel to the Senate permanent subcommittee on investigations.

Together, McCarthy and Cohn abused the official powers of office to slander citizens, accusing them of homosexuality, leaving destroyed careers and reputations in their wake.

Cohn, himself a closeted homosexual, was favored for his aggressive questioning during the closed sessions of the Army-McCarthy hearings in 1954. McCarthy's own sexual preferences have been called into question. Roy Cohn is seen as the central planner of McCarthy's anti-communist investigations during the Second Red Scare, and his contributions to McCarthy's obsession ultimately ended both of their careers.



McCarthy and Cohn, Censured and Resign

On June 19th 1953 Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were condemned to die and were executed without hope for clemency from the Eisenhower administration. Roy Cohn lead their prosecution.

After McCarthy's embarrassment in 1954 the Eisenhower administration, in an effort to contain McCarthy's influence over popular opinion did engage in efforts to undermine the validity of those surrounding McCarthy, sweeping Cohn into the wake of the imploding McCarthy.

Both McCarthy and Cohn were then accused of the abuse of power. McCarthy's political career was ruined and within three years of his censure he died of symptoms of alcohol abuse, ending the McCarthyism era. While McCarthy's reputation had fallen into the gutter, Cohn's never left it.



5 STAR 1

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Wisconsin's Dynamic Newspaper

Cool

Granny

FIVE CENTS

JOE M'CARTHY DEAD

Court Revamp Plan Killed by Senate

U.S. Indicts Beck for Tax Evasion

Liver Ailment Ends Career Of Senator

UN Given Data On Hungary Fight

Joe's Death Opens Up Senate Race

Still Firm Foe Of Diversion, Thomson Says

OK $2 Billion To Build Schools

Ask Fair Postal Rate for Dailies

U.S. Employe Rolls Increase

Clean Out Smut, FBI Chief Asks

Invite Jaga to Tea?

SPECIAL ELECTION LOOMS

INDEX

Cohn was Trump's Mentor

Roy Cohn would cobble together a shady legal career, service as a defense attorney for organized crime and mentoring a young **Donald Trump**.

When Trump's first Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, recused himself from a federal investigation into ties between the Trump campaign and Russia, in 2017, the President was angry. "Where's my Roy Cohn?" he yelled.

Trump and Cohn had met forty-four years earlier, in 1973. But Roy Cohn—an American scoundrel and the lawyer who helped send Julius and Ethel Rosenberg to the electric chair, aided Senator Joseph McCarthy in implementing the Red Scare, and showed Trump the ropes in the real-estate business—was long gone. Cohn died in 1986.



The John Birch Society, McCarthyism's Grass Roots

The John Birch Society was founded by Robert Welch on December 9th 1958, one year after McCarthy's death, in Indianapolis Indiana. Welch accused president Dwight Eisenhower of being a communist and stated that the communists control 60 to 80% of the United states, an example of the grossly exaggerated fabrications that would become the John Birch Society's trademark.



The John Birch society's membership was composed of the middle class whites. Its peak membership reached 100,000 members in the mid-1960s when it operated with an annual budget of $8 million.

John Birch cells were formed and met secretly in living rooms across America. The "cells" were kept separated from each other, so that eachc ould be controlled from a central authority.

John Birch chapters were organized into groups of no more than 20 people, intentionally mimicking communist cells. Welch stated that through mimicry of the Communist Party structure, which he admired for its effectiveness, he hoped to use communist organizing strategy against itself.

The John Birch Society

As the Red Scare diminished, so did the John Birch society. Funding and membership tapered off as the threat of communism shrank, unable to bear up under the pressure of political and cultural suppression inspired by McCarthyism and the “Birchers”.

The John Birch Society is known as the successor to the anti communist conspiracy slander spread by McCarthy. In similar fashion, JBS made a standard practice of unsubstantiated accusations meant to weaken confidence in centralized authority, calling rule of law into question.

JBS conflated communist infiltration of the federal government with the moral duty to dismantle it. They and their predecessors hid behind “Traditional American Values” while de-legitimizing the Federal government and the people’s democratic institutions.



Old Extremism, New Extremes

McCarthyite and Bircher tactics are still thoroughly in widespread use by their modern iterations, the Tea Party and MAGA reactionaries of today. Trump's political spectacle of fear and consumption would be the pride of his mentor Roy Cohn; inciting fear, chaos and disunity, making a sanctuary for fascism and flagrantly extracting people's wealth to line the pockets of Monopoly capital.

McCarthy and Trump are considered personal failures, exemplars of base values and unprincipled conduct having defined their lives, achieving notoriety through stark ruthlessness, not talent.

While the persecution of the Left under McCarthyism served as a means to an end; collusion with Nazis and Transnational Corporations, Trump's project is far more insidious end in itself. No longer a mere shelter for fascism and assisting monopoly capital, Trump makes a permanent home of the Executive Branch for fascism.





Discussion

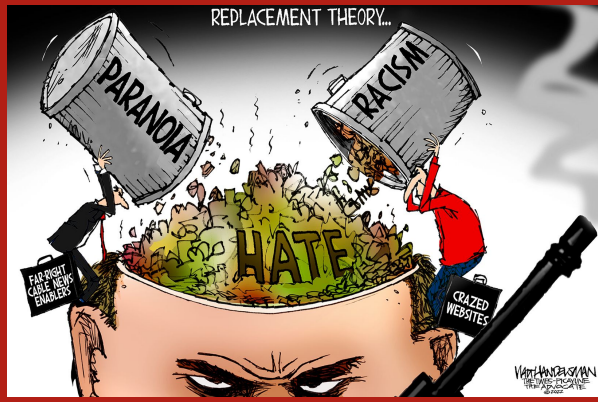


The “Red Scares” of Today, Third Wave Affects

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952

A Law from the Era of Red Scares is Supercharging Trump Administration's Power Over Immigrants and Noncitizens by The Conversation magazine:

Nativism, the idea that government must guard native-born Americans from various threats posed by immigrants, has a long history in the United States. Today, the Trump administration is citing the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, a restrictive measure written by nativist members of Congress decades ago when fears of communism were rampant, to sharply restrict the rights of noncitizens. Under this law, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, federal agencies have arrested and detained noncitizens associated with pro-Palestinian protests, reintroduced immigrant registration requirements, and imposed a new travel ban that affects 19 nations. Since the 1950s, Congress has removed some of this sprawling federal law's most discriminatory features, such as racist national origins quotas. But other key provisions remain on the books. Now they are the primary legal basis for some of President Donald Trump's most controversial immigration crackdowns.



Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory claims that there is a concerted effort to replace white Americans with black and brown immigrants

The McCarran-Walter Act



Mahmoud Khalil speaking at demonstration

In March 2025, the White House invoked the McCarran-Walter Act to justify arresting and deporting Mahmoud Khalil, a legal permanent resident who had participated in pro-Palestinian protests at Columbia University. Officials pointed to Section 237(a)(4)(C) of the law, which states that any “alien whose presence or activities in the United States the Secretary of State has reasonable ground to believe would have potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences for the United States is deportable.”

This has been tried only once before. In 1995, the Clinton administration unsuccessfully sought to use the provision to deport a former Mexican official, Mario Ruiz Massieu, to face charges in his homeland for extortion and obstructing a murder investigation. Ruiz Massieu was later indicted in the U.S. on money laundering charges and died by suicide shortly before his arraignment.

Attacking Immigrants, Academia

The Trump administration cited the same provision to justify detaining Tufts University doctoral student Rumeysa Ozturk in March. Ozturk came under government scrutiny because she co-authored an op-ed in the Tufts student newspaper criticizing the university's position on the Israel-Gaza war. Surveillance footage of a terrified Ozturk being arrested by masked Immigration Customs and Enforcement agents on a street in Somerville, Massachusetts, drew criticism from government officials and civil liberties advocates. In response, Secretary of State Marco Rubio alleged that Ozturk had harmed U.S. interests by supporting "movements that are involved in doing things like vandalizing universities, harassing students, taking over buildings, creating a ruckus." Khalil and Ozturk both were released after weeks in detention, pending final resolution of their cases. Their lawyers argue that their clients' treatment violates free speech protections and that the defendants were punished for expressing their political beliefs.



Rumeysa Ozturk being detained by plain-clothes ICE agent

Measures Against Marxism's Dangerous Adherents and Noxious Islamists (MAMDANI) Act

In April 2026, Republican Representative Chip Roy of Texas introduced in Congress H.R. 8387 which would in his website's own words:

"The MAMDANI Act enacts sweeping immigration law changes that would deport, denaturalize, deny U.S. citizenship, or entry to any alien who is a member of a socialist party, a communist party, the Chinese Communist Party, or Islamic fundamentalist party, or advocates for socialism, communism, Marxism, or Islamic fundamentalism."

The bill was sponsored by the Immigration Accountability Project which receives money from the Heritage Foundation



Representative Chip Roy (R-TX)

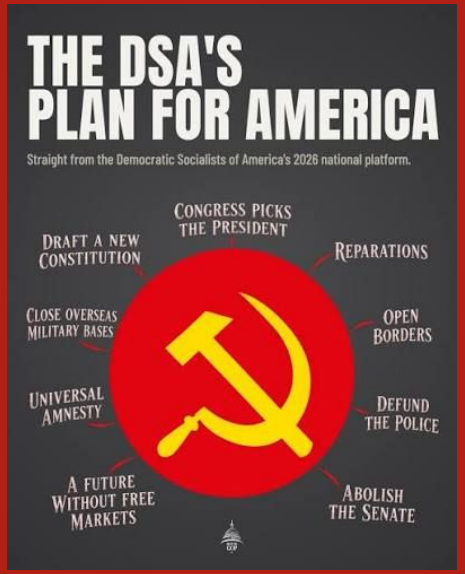
Communist Control Act of 2026

The Purpose of the bill if passed is to amend the Communist Control Act of 1954 to treat the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) like the Communist Party USA (CPUSA).

The Communist Control Act of 1954 outlawed the Communist Party and criminalized membership in the Party with a penalty of $10,000, up to 5 years in prison, or both.

The law also removed collective bargaining rights granted under the National Labor Relations Act for “Communist-Infiltrated” Trade Unions.

This law would more than anything cause fear and hysteria whereby members of the DSA would leave en masse and the trade unions would expel union members for communist or socialist views.



Georgia Rep. Rich McCormick introduced the Communist Control Act of 2026 to place the Democratic Socialists of America under the same legal restrictions as the Communist Party of the United States.

Slide Title

Generally this side is reserved for media such as videos and images



Discussion & Wrap Up

Announcements

- PCUSA Cell Chairs need to call members of their cells to remind them about attendance.

- The next issue of New Masses (2026) has begun production. If you have art you want us to feature, email it to info@partyofcommunistsusa.net.

Volunteers Needed!

We are in need of volunteers for the staff of the People's School! Here's a few roles we need filled:

- People to help manage posting on our social media and podcast platforms
- Video Editors, Audio Editors, Graphic Designers, Artists, Narrators
- Facilitators, Web Controls, Moderators

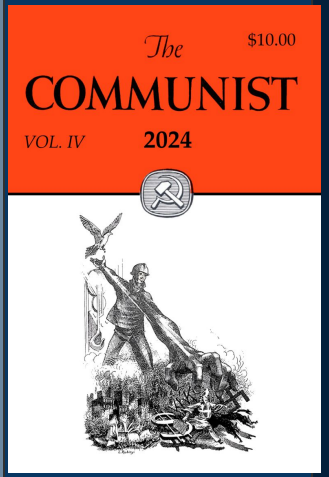
Email info@peoplesschool.us if you're interested and try to attend our next staff meeting.

New Outlook Publishers

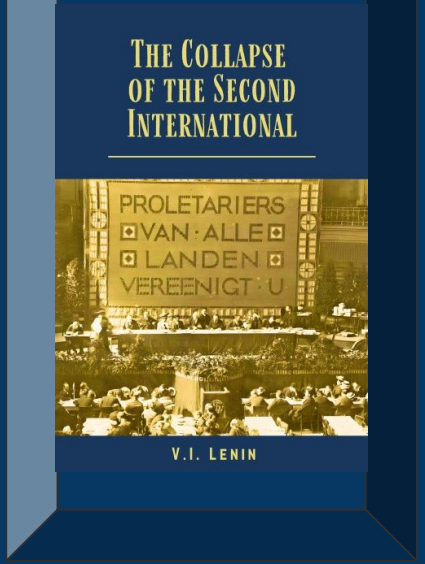
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- ★ **The Jewish Peoples Schule educates in fraternity along secular, progressive lines to our Jewish and non-Jewish friends to share and relate the historical struggles of the Jewish peoples to other peoples’ struggles against oppression.**
- ★ **Join us for Chanukah and the viewing of “Incitement” - December 12th, 2026 2:30 PM to 5:00 PM EASTERN.**
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The Communists Have the Music - They Might Be Giants