

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 203

“1919 – The United States I”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

On Friday, December 21, 1917, a Russian freighter, SS *Shilka*, berthed at Pier Five in the American port city of Seattle. Foreign merchant ships were nothing new in Seattle, but *Shilka* was significant for being the first Russian vessel to arrive in a US port since the October Revolution, just weeks earlier.

On Christmas Eve, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* ran a banner headline trumpeting the story of the freighter’s arrival. *Shilka* was rumored to be carrying \$100,000 in Bolshevik gold, intended to fund the subversive activities of American labor unions.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 203. 1919. The United States, part one.

Labor unrest was simmering around the world in 1919. In hindsight, the reasons for this are plain, and if you’ve been following along with this podcast, you already know many of them. The world economy grew dramatically from 1871-1914 and the middle class expanded, but the working class was left behind, mired in a miserable poverty that left many wondering if modern liberal democracy and capitalism could or would ever improve the lot of those stuck in the lower classes. Hence the rise of socialism over this period.

Then came the Great War and the economic shocks it engendered. At first, the war improved the economic lot of many of the poorest in the Western nations. Food prices rose, which benefitted farmers. The demand for arms and munitions kept factories humming around the clock. Mass conscription created labor shortages in the belligerent nations, creating a healthy demand for factory workers and therefore rising wages. Although the US was neutral, it shared in the agricultural and manufacturing boom.

But 1916 brought with it even higher food prices and the beginning of widespread food shortages. The Turnip Winter that followed aggravated the problem. These price increases hit

factory workers especially hard. In the United States of our time, American families typically spend about 10% of their income on food, and almost half of that is spent in restaurants. In 1917, Americans spent 40% of their income on food, and that number was likely above 50% in many working class families, and they rarely ate out. I have to say here that even I remember a time when most Americans regarded eating out as a major extravagance, something you only did on birthdays or anniversaries or other special occasions.

In traditional societies, poor people typically lived in the countryside, and could grow or raise their own food to supplement their income. But the modern poor are urban. They live in rented apartments and don't have access to land where they could grow vegetables or raise chickens. Cash for food is their only option.

You can understand the frustration and disillusionment of these workers. Many had recently landed the highest-paying jobs of their lives. They had been looking forward to a better life. Many had signed new leases and moved into new and more comfortable housing. Now, just months later, rising food prices had eaten up the pay increase and more, squeezed the family budget, and left them no better off than before. By 1917, 1918, 1919, many were worse off than before, despite enjoying their largest ever paydays.

In 1919, people didn't yet call this phenomenon "inflation." They spoke of the "high cost of living," sometimes abbreviated HCL, and this was a phrase on everyone's lips. The high cost of living helped spark the February Revolution in Russia two years earlier, and the inability of the new Provisional Government to contain food prices helps explain its rapid loss of public support. The high cost of living triggered worker unrest and strikes and demonstrations in Austria-Hungary and Germany that contributed to their collapse and the end of the war. Labor unrest triggered violence and political backlash in Italy. It led to rice riots in Japan that brought down the Japanese government, and to waves of strikes in the United Kingdom and the US. France alone among the major powers seems to have avoided the worst of this unrest, which I suppose you can attribute to a combination of the productivity of French farms, an efficient rationing system, and a patriotic spirit among a people who had so many enemy soldiers on their home soil.

In the US, a combination of high levels of agricultural production, wage and price controls, and appeals to patriotism kept a lid on the pot for a while, but by early 1919, with the fighting over and the soldiers coming home, American workers were growing impatient. Food prices were still high, while those returning soldiers were returning into the job market. Job opportunities became scarce, which tended to push wages down. And then there's the racial dimension. White working-class soldiers from the big cities returned expecting to take up their old jobs, only some of them found that their services were no longer required. They had been replaced. By African-American workers.

The summer of 1919 would become known as the “Red Summer,” red as in the blood of those killed in the worst racial violence in US history.

But I’m saving that story for next week. This week, allow me to begin by directing your attention to the port city of Seattle, Washington, at the northwest corner of the United States, with a population of about 300,000 in 1919. Seattle had gotten its start as a lumber town, where timber harvested inland was brought down to be sawn into boards and shipped to market. In the 1890s, the Klondike Gold Rush made Seattle the principal port of departure to Alaska and the Yukon, and the city prospered as a transportation and supply hub for would-be gold miners and their gold wealth. The shipbuilding business boomed.

Seattle was also a big union town, and in the early years of the twentieth century, the Industrial Workers of the World, the IWW, also known as the “Wobblies,” had a strong presence in the city. Nearby Everett, Washington was the site of the so-called “Everett Massacre,” also called “Bloody Sunday,” on November 5, 1916, when a ship full of Wobblies from Seattle attempted to dock at Everett so the Wobblies could demonstrate in support of the Everett shingleworkers’ strike. The ship was met by a mob of over 200 so-called “citizen-deputies” appointed by the Snohomish County sheriff. These vigilantes fired on the ship and forced it back to Seattle. They then arrested some seventy local Wobblies in Everett. At least seven people were killed, all by vigilante gunfire.

Then came the Great War, which further stimulated the shipbuilding industry as the US government scrambled to acquire shipping capacity to send soldiers and supplies to Europe. Wage controls were imposed. Labor union leaders like Samuel Gompers of the AFL, the American Federation of Labor, pledged to cooperate with government and industry for the sake of the war effort. The IWW was more militant, and over a hundred Wobbly leaders were prosecuted under the Espionage Act, which we discussed back in episode 158.

In December 1917, this Russian freighter, *Shilka*, arrived in Seattle, as I described at the top of the episode, and rumors flew that the ship was part of some insidious Bolshevik plot to work with the IWW to spread communist revolution in the United States. The Wobblies sent a delegation to Pier Five to welcome the ship and embrace the free Russian men who had thrown off the shackles of capitalist oppression. The members of this delegation were promptly arrested under the Espionage Act, along with one of the Russian sailors who had left the ship to speak with them.

Shilka was searched and was determined not to be carrying any gold, but rather a cargo of licorice root, beans, and peas that had begun its journey to the US before the Revolution had broken out back home. Undeterred by facts, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* next floated speculation that the proceeds from the sale of these Bolshevik peas would be spent to foment revolution. Stories about the mysterious Communist ship spread to newspapers in Portland, in San Francisco, and in New York. *Shilka* left Seattle in January 1918, carrying a load of pig iron

bound for Japan, but the tensions it had revealed between the labor unions and the local authorities lingered.

By January 1919, the shipbuilders in Seattle were feeling the same pinch as workers across the globe. They had gone nearly two years with wages frozen by federal fiat while the cost of living was steadily rising. Well, the war was over now, wasn't it? On January 21, some 35,000 shipyard workers in Seattle went on strike for higher wages.

The Emergency Fleet Corporation, which had been created by the US government to acquire merchant ships for war needs, was the biggest customer of these shipyards. The head of the EFC sent a telegram to the shipyard owners' organization in Seattle, called the Metal Trades Association. In it, he warned that the EFC would cancel its contracts with any shipyard that gave in to the workers' demands. Unfortunately for him, his telegram was delivered to the offices of, not the Metal Trades Association, but the Metal Trades Council, which was the union that had called the strike.

To the union leaders, this telegram was proof that the US government was conspiring with the shipyard owners to break the strike. There were other overt anti-union activities. Strikers were denied credit at Seattle grocery stores. The police raided a co-op that had been created to distribute food.

Seattle was one of the most unionized cities in the nation at the time, with dozens of AFL locals and a strong IWW presence. The Metal Trades Council reached out to the Seattle Central Labor Council and asked for all labor unions in the city to call a general strike. They agreed, over a hundred labor organizations in all.

This was the first general strike in US history and it shut the city down, but the workers formed a General Strike Committee to carry out essential services. Striking workers collected garbage, staffed the hospitals, and distributed food. Communal kitchens served tens of thousands of meals at a price of 25 cents for all you can eat, if you were a striking worker, or 35 cents for anyone else.

Most of the strikers were not Wobblies, but members of the much more conservative American Federation of Labor. The strike was peaceful. Nevertheless, business people and conservative-leaning politicians and newspapers reacted with shock and horror to the Seattle general strike, no one more so than Seattle's own mayor, the 45-year old Ole Hanson, a Progressive Republican. Hanson had been mayor of Seattle for less than a year. Ironically, he'd positioned himself as the more labor-friendly candidate during the election, which was how you wanted to be seen in such a pro-labor town.

I say "ironically" because Mayor Hanson reacted to the strike as if it were the October Revolution all over again, only played out this time in an American city, and issued ringing denunciations in exactly those terms. Hanson beefed up the Seattle Police Department with new

officers and deputized over 2,000 students from the University of Washington to assist them, as well as bringing in federal troops and marines. He warned that anyone who “attempted to take over the control of the municipal government functions,” whatever that means, would be shot.

Meanwhile, the national AFL organization also denounced the strikers and pressed them to return to work. After paralyzing the city for five days, the strike collapsed in the face of Mayor Hanson’s threats and the disapproval of the AFL, though the underlying shipyard strike would continue for many months longer.

Ole Hanson claimed to have broken the strike single handed and saved America from the menace of Bolshevism. In August, he resigned his position, after just a year and a half on the job. He wrote a book entitled *Americanism versus Bolshevism* and toured the country, giving lectures on the Bolshevik threat. This new line of work paid him an estimated \$38,000 in just a few months, quite a lot of money for the time, and far more than he would have made as Mayor of Seattle, it was a lucrative gig for Ole Hanson, until his position as America’s Number One Opponent of Bolshevism was usurped by Calvin Coolidge. More about that in a few minutes.

In 1919, anti-Bolshevik panic was very much a thing in the United States. It did not start with the general strike in Seattle, although that event certainly helped build its momentum. In the other Washington, the one in the District of Columbia, the United States Senate had a special three-member subcommittee going, known as the Overman Committee, after its chair, Senator Lee Overman, a Democrat from North Carolina. The Overman Committee had been created in 1918 to investigate underground pro-German activities in the United States, especially in the beer brewing industry, which was largely controlled by German immigrants and their families.

On February 4, while the general strike in Seattle was brewing in Washington the state, the US Senate in Washington the city passed a resolution to expand the Overman Committee’s mandate to include an investigation of Bolshevik efforts to incite communist revolution in the United States. The committee held hearings and questioned witnesses, most of whom were former Russian officials who had fled the Bolshevik takeover and other anti-Bolshevik voices that had no love for the new Russian government. These witnesses described in lurid terms the violence and chaos in Russia and warned of anti-Americanism in American colleges and universities and pushed the false but common claim of the time that most Communists were Jewish.

The following month, March 1919, the US Attorney General, Thomas Gregory, resigned after nearly five years in the position. Gregory’s vigorous enforcement of the Espionage Act in 1917 and 1918 against anyone who spoke out against the war and the draft (mostly socialists) was controversial, as you’ll recall from episode 158, and his departure left the Department of Justice at something of a crossroads. To succeed him, President Wilson appointed the 46-year old Mitchell Palmer. Palmer was an attorney, a Democrat, and a Quaker, born in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. As a member of Congress, Palmer had supported Wilson for the Democratic Party

nomination in 1912. After the election, Wilson had offered him the post of Secretary of War, but Palmer turned that one down as inconsistent with his Quaker beliefs.

In October 1917, after the US declaration of war, Wilson appointed Palmer as Alien Property Custodian, making Palmer responsible for the seizure and sale of German-owned property in the United States. This included, notably, Friedrich Bayer's Bayer aspirin plant in New York and the associated trademarks, as you'll recall from episode 172. Palmer was aggressive about selling off German-owned businesses in the US because he believed Germany's industrial and economic might would make it an ongoing threat to America even after losing the war. His policy therefore was to minimize the share of the US economy that would be German controlled.

As Alien Property Custodian, Palmer had appeared before the Overman Committee to testify against the beer brewing industry. Palmer told the committee that the brewing industry was riddled with German sympathizers and was working covertly against the war effort.

But that was 1918. Now it's 1919, the Overman Committee is investigating Bolshevism, and Mitchell Palmer is Attorney General. Less than two months after he was appointed to the position, barely enough time for the gold lettering on his new office door to dry, the United States was rocked by an anarchist mail bomb campaign, one that sent about thirty bombs to prominent figures in business, government, and law enforcement. The targets included US Senators and Members of Congress, Theodore Bilbo, the pro-lynching Governor of Mississippi, the Governor and the Attorney General of Pennsylvania, the Mayor of New York City, and, among figures we've met before in this podcast, US Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Albert Burleson, the Postmaster General who'd been instrumental in shutting down socialist newspapers and magazines, John D. Rockefeller of Ludlow Massacre fame, and J.P. Morgan Jr., who you'll recall was instrumental in financing the Allied war effort. Also targeted were Ole Hanson, post-general strike, but still at this time the Mayor of Seattle, and Mitchell Palmer himself.

The anarchists behind the mail bomb campaign had tried to time the packages to arrive on May first, the International Workers' Day, although the first of them reached their destinations three days earlier, on April 28. Many of the packages were intercepted by the Post Office or failed to explode as intended; those that did mostly injured the staffs and servants of the would-be targets, in some cases seriously. It could have been a lot worse, but even as it was, it terrified many Americans. A month later, in the evening of June 2, the anarchists struck again, this time setting off larger bombs in eight American cities, including at the home of Attorney General Palmer in Washington. The explosion at Palmer's home took the life of the Italian immigrant anarchist setting it when his bomb exploded prematurely. It virtually destroyed the Palmer home. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Roosevelt, who lived across the street, rushed to the house after hearing the blast and found the Attorney General wandering dazed in front of the damaged building, but happily neither he nor anyone in his family was seriously injured.

Two weeks later, the Overman Committee issued its final report. With regard to Bolshevism, the committee report was short on actual evidence of any kind of Bolshevik conspiracy, Russian or domestic, aimed at overthrowing the government of the United States. But the committee report insisted there was one, and went into lurid detail describing the apocalyptic wasteland that would be the United States following a Bolshevik takeover. It described the confiscation of all property, businesses, farms, and newspapers. It spoke of shutting down churches, even Sunday schools, and the abolition of all debts, public and private. It warned that prostitution would become legal. There would be no democracy. Citizens would have no rights, and would be subject to military conscription and forced labor. And for some reason this report got particularly exercised over the foul Bolshevik threat to cancel all life insurance policies in the United States following the revolution, calling that possibility “[o]ne of the most appalling and far-reaching consequences of an application of Bolshevism in the United States...” Well, your mileage may vary, as they say.

This sequence of events—two waves of anarchist bombings and then an incendiary Senate committee report over a period of just a few weeks—received heavy and sensational coverage in American newspapers and helped trigger a full-blown anti-Bolshevik panic across the country that history would eventually call the First Red Scare. Attorney General Palmer warned the nation that the Bolshevik uprising could come any day now and asked Congress for a 30% increase in the Justice Department budget to help fight the menace. (He didn’t get it.)

And there was another factor that contributed to the national fears. The summer of 1919 saw more racial violence in the US than any year before or since. Again, that’s too big a story for me to include in this week’s episode, so I’m going to defer it until next week, but I mention it here because it meshes closely with the Red Scare. Many white Americans saw the racial violence as of a piece with the anarchist bombings and the labor unrest and further evidence that revolution was just around the corner. Newspapers reported as fact that Bolshevik agitators were stirring up African-American violence against white Americans, this despite the fact that most of what I’m delicately referring to here as “racial violence” was in fact white American violence against African Americans. Curiously, the question of who exactly was stirring up white Americans to commit violence against their African-American fellow citizens was left unaddressed.

[music: “Memphis Blues”]

In August, 1919, Palmer created a new division within the Justice Department’s Bureau of Investigation. It would be called the General Intelligence Division, and its task would be to investigate leftist subversion in America. To head this new division, Palmer chose a 24-year old attorney named J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover had just graduated from law school two years earlier; his previous position was head of the Justice Department’s Alien Enemy Bureau, an office tasked with identifying and imprisoning foreign citizens with German sympathies. We see here again as with the Overman Committee how smoothly government agencies meant to investigate covert pro-German activities in the United States, which were a very real thing, as we saw in

episode 119, transitioned seamlessly into investigating highly dubious claims of an imminent Bolshevik insurrection in the United States, just weeks after the Armistice.

That same month, August, saw the formation of not one but two new pro-Bolshevik political parties in the US, the Communist Party of America and the Communist Labor Party, the latter splitting off from the more moderate Socialist Party of America. The formation of these two new parties, though peaceful and legal, seemed to confirm the most hysterical claims that Bolshevism was coming to America.

Also in the summer of 1919, labor unions began appearing in municipal police departments across the United States. Police officers, like other working people, were finding that their paychecks weren't keeping pace with that high cost of living everyone was talking about, and that summer the American Federation of Labor began for the first time to accept police unions into its membership. On August 15, the police union in Boston was granted an AFL charter. The city police commissioner, Edwin Curtis, denounced the union, asserting that union membership was inconsistent with a police officer's duties. Not only did he refuse to meet with the new union's leaders, he suspended them from the force, which won him the accolade, "the Ole Hanson of the East."

Suspension is typically the first step toward dismissal, but Curtis postponed moves to dismiss the suspended union leaders. He wanted to give them time to reconsider. They would not. In the interim, the Mayor of Boston, Andrew Peters, proposed a compromise plan, under which the city would agree to the formation of a police union, provided the union agreed not to affiliate with the AFL and to forego the right to strike. Commissioner Peters rejected this compromise and began moving to dismiss the suspended union leaders. In response, Boston police officers voted almost unanimously to go on strike as of the evening of September 9, just before sunset.

The city was entirely unprepared for the police walkout. The first night saw incidents of rock-throwing and vandalism, and occasional looting in parts of the city. By the next morning, National Guard units were brought in until 5,000 were patrolling the city, far in excess of the number of police officers, along with hastily recruited replacements, some of them students from Harvard University. Barbed wire and machine gun emplacements were set up around public buildings and banks. Boston was peaceful by day, but disorder continued over the next few nights; nine Bostonians were shot and killed, eight of them by the police replacements.

So was the strike disruptive? Did it allow a surge of crime and violence? It surely did, but the sensational newspaper coverage it received was way over the top, incorporating inflammatory terms like "radical," "soviet," "chaos," and "terror." In 1919, it was possible to believe that a labor union organizing a police strike was a Bolshevik plot to neutralize the forces of law and order as a prelude to revolution, and that's how the newspapers played it. Never mind that some of the strikers were recently returned veterans of the Great War. They were called "traitors" and "agents of Lenin." The Philadelphia *Public Ledger* wrote that "Bolshevism in the United States

is no longer a specter. Boston in chaos reveals its sinister substance.” *The Wall Street Journal* wrote, “Lenin and Trotsky are on their way.” A US Senator, Henry Myers, a Democrat from Montana, declared that unless steps were taken, “the nation will see a Soviet government set up within two years.” It was said that Tremont Street in Boston looked like Nevsky Prospekt in Petrograd during the February Revolution. (It didn’t.)

AFL President Samuel Gompers, recently returned from the Paris Peace Conference, urged the striking police officers to return to work, as it was clear the union was taking a beating in the ring of public opinion. The union called off the strike, but Commissioner Curtis refused to rehire any of the strikers. He announced that he would recruit an all-new police force, and by the way, the new officers would be paid 20% more than the wage the strikers had been receiving. Samuel Gompers protested in a telegram to Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge that so harsh a punishment was unjust, given that it was Curtis who precipitated the strike by moving to dismiss the union leaders. Coolidge replied to Gompers with a tart telegram that read in part, “Your assertion that the Commissioner was wrong cannot justify leaving the city unguarded... There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, at any time.”

Coolidge’s telegram was printed and quoted in newspapers across America, particularly that pithy final line, and his stance was applauded everywhere. One Boston newspaper called Coolidge “the winner of a shining triumph for straight Americanism.” Over the months that followed, Coolidge would displace Ole Hanson in the popular imagination as the man who had single-handedly saved America from the Bolshevik menace of collectivization, prostitution, and the end of life insurance as we know it. In 1920, his new fame would propel him to the Republican nomination for Vice President of the United States.

The US experienced two more major strikes in 1919, in the steel industry and in coal mining. Here it was the same story. The strikes were condemned by industry leaders as instigated by Bolsheviks and denounced as part of a larger campaign to paralyze the nation and spark revolution. The steel strike began in September, just days after the end of the police strike in Boston. State and local authorities in Indiana, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere attacked picket lines and clubbed striking workers, arresting them by the thousands. Martial law was declared in Gary, Indiana. The steel companies hired tens of thousands of replacement workers, most of them African American and Latino American. The strike collapsed by the end of the year, along with the union. There would be no further significant labor action in the US until the 1930s.

There was little response from the Wilson Administration to the steel strike, because the President suffered a stroke on October 2, just a week and a half in. When coal miners went on strike on November 1, the country heard another round of accusations that the strike was instigated by Bolsheviks. Attorney General Mitchell Palmer took the union to court and obtained an injunction against the strike under the Lever Act, which you’ll recall was emergency wartime legislation giving the Federal government power to regulate and ration food and fuel.

This injunction was controversial. The labor unions protested that the war was over, and had been for a year. Technically, the US was still in a state of war, since it had not yet ratified the Treaty of Versailles (spoiler alert: it's not going to), but the point was that there was no more war effort, no more mobilization, no more soldiers abroad, so what was the justification for exercising emergency wartime powers? Even within the Administration, there was division, with the Secretary of Labor opposing the Attorney General's injunction on the grounds that President Wilson had already promised the labor unions that the Lever Act would not be used against them back when the bill was introduced.

But Wilson himself was too ill from his recent stroke to make policy decisions or settle policy disputes within his cabinet, and so the administration remained divided against itself. I'll have more to say about Wilson, his stroke, and the campaign to ratify the Treaty of Versailles in a couple of episodes, but we'll have to leave it here for now.

Not that Mitchell Palmer was content to leave it there. Despite the fact that he had himself twice been targeted by anarchist bombs, Palmer had at first seemed reluctant to move against the supposed Bolshevik threat, even drawing criticism for his mild response. But the coal strike seems to have been his tipping point. Besides seeking that injunction, Palmer sent a report to the US Senate, affirming that Bolshevik threat and attributing to it not only labor actions, but the upsurge in racial violence the nation was experiencing.

He also turned loose the Justice Department, and especially J. Edgar Hoover's Bureau of Investigation, against socialists, communists, and anarchists in America. At 9:00 PM on November 7, 1919, the date deliberately chosen because it was the second anniversary of the October Revolution, police and federal agents began simultaneous raids in twelve American cities, raids directed at radicals under the Sedition Act, most of whom were immigrants. Over a thousand people were arrested in one night. The largest single raid was in New York City, and it targeted the Russian People's House, a community center for Russian immigrants known to be used by radicals. They rounded up about 200 people in or near the building, many without warrants and despite the lack of any evidence of a crime. Some of them just happened to be in the building, or on the sidewalk outside. Some of them were sitting in a night school algebra class. Many of those arrested were beaten with clubs and blackjacks.

This was the first of what history will call the "Palmer Raids." Hundreds of these arrestees were held for months, incommunicado. Most were eventually released without ever being charged with a crime. When criminal charges weren't available, the Justice Department targeted immigrant arrestees, some of whom were liable for deportation under US immigration law simply for having peacefully advocated anarchism or revolution. On December 21, a ship loaded with 249 deportees deemed "undesirables," mostly because of their associations with anarchism, including 199 who had been arrested in that raid, left New York City for Russia. This group included Emma Goldman, the anarchist political activist who had immigrated from Imperial

Russia in 1895, half her lifetime ago. You'll recall we first met Emma Goldman all the way back in episode 16.

The press dubbed this ship full of deportees the "Red Ark." The mass arrests and deportations were mostly praised in the American press. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* opined, "It is hoped and expected that other vessels...carrying similar cargoes, will follow in her wake." Two notable exceptions were the two most prominent left-leaning magazines of the time, *The Nation* and the recently founded *New Republic*.

On January 2, 1920, a second, even larger, Palmer Raid was conducted over 33 US cities, arresting over 3,000 people. But by this time, a number of American lawyers began to criticize Palmer and the Justice Department for this practice of mass arrests of people without warrants or probable cause. Palmer rejected the criticism, asserting that he was dealing with an "epidemic," as he put it, and ordinary legal methods would be inadequate. The *Washington Post* agreed, opining that "There is no time to waste on hairsplitting over infringement of liberties."

By spring of 1920, Palmer was positioning himself for a bid for that year's Democratic Party nomination for President, to succeed Woodrow Wilson. But criticism of his methods continued to mount. Palmer struck back at his critics, accusing them of harboring a "perverted sympathy for the criminal anarchists." He began to predict that the Bolsheviks were planning an armed revolution for the coming May Day.

But over time, the fear of Bolshevism began to subside and Mitchell Palmer began to sound like a bit of a crank. Even his fellow cabinet members were becoming skeptical. Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels wrote that Palmer "was seeing red behind every bush and every demand for an increase in wages."

When May 1, 1920 came and went without the predicted Bolshevik uprising, Palmer began to look a little silly. Federal courts began ordering the release of those arrested without charge in the raids, undermining the Justice Department's legal position. The Chicago *Tribune*, hardly a radical publication, printed a political cartoon titled "Mitchell Palmer Out for a Stroll." It showed a nervous, perspiring Mitchell Palmer walking down a street full of people, every one of whom, from the milkman to the police officer to the girls skipping rope to the beggar to the baby in a carriage, was drawn as a bearded, scruffy Bolshevik wielding a bomb. (I'll post the cartoon at the website.)

The Red Scare tapered off after that. There would be no more raids, and Mitchell Palmer would not be nominated for President, in part because of strong opposition from labor unions. He would instead return to the private practice of law, although he remained active in the Democratic Party for the rest of his life. He died in 1936, at the age of 64.

America went a little bit crazy in 1918, with the Espionage Act and the Sedition Act, and the challenging of the patriotism of German- and Irish-Americans and anyone else who doubted the

wisdom of entering the Great War. But when the Armistice came, the wave of madness didn't end. Instead, it transitioned into a rage against Bolshevism. In European democracies like France and Germany and Italy, communist parties became an established part of the political process. But in the United States, Bolshevism, or communism, was regarded as an alien and hostile ideology from the beginning, and communist leanings as unpatriotic and antithetical to American principles.

This hostility to communism spilled over into hostility against labor unions. And then against immigrants, especially immigrants from Eastern Europe and Italy, who were seen as the source of these radical and dangerous ideas. By 1920, it had subsided into an undercurrent. But that undercurrent would prove remarkably persistent.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Gerald for making a donation, and thank you to Luke for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Gerald and Luke help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so thank you all for that. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we go from Red Scare to Red Summer. That's not red as in socialism, that's red as in blood. The Red Summer, next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Another American who became prominent during the Red Scare of 1919 was a lawyer and Harvard Law professor named Felix Frankfurter. He was born to a Jewish family in Vienna and emigrated to the United States with his parents when he was twelve years old. He graduated from City College of New York and Harvard Law School. He was a Progressive and a supporter of Theodore Roosevelt. When the United States entered the war, Frankfurter took a leave of absence from Harvard to serve as assistant to the Secretary of War, and then as Judge Advocate General.

Then he took a position as counsel to the President's Mediation Committee, which had been created to help mediate labor disputes in war-related industries, including the dispute that led to the Bisbee Deportation, episode 158. Frankfurter became sympathetic to the grievances of workers and labor unions, which earned him a reputation as a radical himself.

He became a Zionist and supported the Balfour Declaration. He also spoke in favor of the League of Nations, ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, and US diplomatic recognition of the

Bolshevik government in Russia. When the Palmer Raids began, Frankfurter was one of a number of prominent lawyers who went to court seeking the release of those who had been detained.

In January 1920, just days after the second Palmer Raid, a number of prominent lawyers opposed to the raids came together to form a new organization to defend civil liberties in the United States, the American Civil Liberties Union. The ACLU's first major action was the publication of a report on the Palmer Raids in May of 1920, just after Palmer's May Day uprising had failed to materialize. Entitled *Report upon the Illegal Practices of the United States Department of Justice*, it enumerated the many violations of the law committed during the Palmer raids, calling them "utterly illegal acts committed by those charged with the highest duty of enforcing the laws." This report, along with the failed May Day prediction, did much to diminish Mitchell Palmer's reputation.

Frankfurter's work for civil liberties also brought him to the attention of J. Edgar Hoover, who labeled him "the most dangerous man in the United States."

[music: Closing Theme]