

**SSUSH16 – Investigate how political, economic, and cultural developments after WWI led to a shared national identity.**

a. Explain how fears of rising communism and socialism in the United States led to the Red Scare and immigrant restriction.

The German philosopher Karl Marx developed a new theory in the mid-nineteenth century that combined history and economics. Marx held that history was composed of a series of revolutions in which those who were oppressed overthrew their oppressors and established new political and economic forms. Marx also said that those in power, who ultimately became oppressors themselves, gradually corrupted these new systems. He held that the final revolution would be between the capitalists and the workers. According to Marx, the workers would eventually tire of being oppressed through low wages and poor working conditions and violently overthrow the capitalist economic system. This workers' revolution, he believed, would usher in a new time period. Out of the revolution would come the creation of a dictatorship in which workers would share the means of production and distribution. Marx's theory became known as a more extreme form of **socialism**, which is known as **communism**.

The idea of a worker controlled economic system appealed to industrial workers worldwide. In 1901, the Socialist Party of America was created. Elements of socialist theory also infiltrated American labor unions, especially the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W). With the exception of the elections of 1912 and 1920, the Socialist Party in the United States was a weak third party. In 1917, communist revolutionaries known as Bolsheviks overthrew the czar in Russia. The new Bolshevik authority established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and was led by Vladimir Lenin. Lenin called for a worldwide revolution to destroy capitalism. America thus became a pivotal target for communist infiltration.

Unable to engage in direct action during World War I, labor unions began to strike for higher wages after the war. These strikes, thought by many to be led by communists, became increasingly more violent. The fear of the spread of communism in the United States was heightened by Karl Marx's prediction of a worker revolution. Were the labor union strikes part of Lenin's mission in the United States? Many saw capitalism and democracy as being in danger from communist threats. The wave of fear and action to protect the United States from such ideological crisis became known as the **Red Scare**. For the most part, Americans were unified to protect the nation's identity as a democratic and capitalist country from communism.

The perceived danger was further exacerbated by a series of bombings sponsored by a group of Italian anarchists. The attacks were carried out against public buildings and officials. Terrorists twice attacked United States Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. These incidents, coupled with the violent labor strikes, led the United States Justice Department and the FBI to stage a series of raids against suspected anarchists and communists. Hundreds were arrested across the nation. However, civil libertarians claimed the Palmer Raids lacked legal standing and targeted people's beliefs rather than their actions. Most of those arrested were later released but 556 people were deported as a result of the Palmer Raids. The Red Scare ended when a purported May Day plot to overthrow the government never took place and Palmer's actions were censured for violating civil liberties.

The Red Scare was also a factor that led to new **restrictions on immigration**. Other factors included two ideas that grew particularly strong during the post-World War I era of the 1920s. One of the ideas was that people born in the United States were superior to immigrants. The other was that America should keep its traditional culture intact. Anti-immigrant, anti-Jewish, and anti-Catholic sentiments contributed to the popularity of a revived Ku Klux Klan, not just in the South but also throughout the nation. By 1924, this conservative reaction against immigrants resulted in the passage of the National Origins Acts. The main provision of the laws was to establish the Quota System, which set limits on the number of immigrants who could enter the United States from each country.

The Red Scare was perceived by many to be a threat to the foundations of the United States. Although sometimes overstepping individual civil liberties, there were strong efforts after World War I to protect and enhance the national identity of the United States.

Define

**Red Scare**

1. **What happened in Russia in 1917?**
2. **What was the Mayday Plot? Did it ever happen?**
3. **What were the palmer raids?**
4. **How did the fear of rising communism and socialism lead to the Red Scare?**
5. **How did the fear of rising communism and socialism lead to immigrant restrictions?**