

William Allen White: The Red Scare Is Un-American (1920)

The majority of Americans supported the actions of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and shared his fears of communist conspiracies. A few people, however, raised concerns about the arbitrary use of police powers to deal with aliens. William Allen White, the crusading editor of the Emporia Gazette in Kansas and a prominent Republican progressive, criticized Palmer's crusade.

From William Allen White, "The Red Scare Is Un-American," *Emporia Gazette* (Kansas), 8 January 1920.

The Attorney General [A. Mitchell Palmer] seems to be seeing red. He is rounding up every manner of radical in the country; every man who hopes for a better world is in danger of deportation by the Attorney General. The whole business is un-American. There are certain rules which should govern in the treason cases.

First, it should be agreed that a man may believe what he chooses.

Second, it should be agreed that when he preaches violence he is disturbing the peace and should be put in jail. Whether he preaches violence in politics, business, or religion, whether he advocates murder and arson and pillage for gain or for political ends, he is violating the common law and should be squelched-jailed until he is willing to quit advocating force in a democracy.

Third, he should be allowed to say what he pleases so long as he advocates legal constitutional methods of procedure. Just because a man does not believe this government is good is no reason why he should be deported.

Abraham Lincoln did not believe this government was all right seventy-five years ago. He advocated changes, but he advocated constitutional means, and he had a war with those who advocated force to maintain the government as it was.

Ten years ago [Theodore] Roosevelt advocated great changes in our American life – in our Constitution, in our social and economic life. Most of the changes he advocated have been made, but they were made in the regular legal way. He preached no force. And if a man desires to preach any doctrine under the shining sun, and to advocate the realization of his vision by lawful, orderly, constitutional means – let him alone. If he is Socialist, anarchist, or Mormon, and merely preaches his creed and does not preach violence, he can do no harm. For the folly of his doctrine will be its answer.

The deportation business is going to make martyrs of a lot of idiots whose cause is not worth it.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Was White concerned that the views of socialists might be true? Explain.
2. How did White suggest social change could be promoted?
3. What did White mean when he wrote that the "deportation business" would create martyrs?