

The American Yawp Reader



Joseph McCarthy on Communism (1950)

Joseph McCarthy on Communism (1950)

Senator Joseph McCarthy's relentless attacks on suspected communist influence in American government so captivated American attention that "McCarthyism" came to stand in for the fervor of Cold War America's anti-communism. In the following extract, McCarthy depicts what he imagined were the stakes his anti-communist crusades.

Five years after a world war has been won, men's hearts should anticipate a long peace, and men's minds should be free from the heavy weight that comes with war. But this is not such a period — for this is not a period of peace. This is a time of the Cold War. This is a time when all the world is split 2 into two vast, increasingly hostile armed camps — a time of a great armaments race. Today we can almost physically hear the mutterings and rumblings of an invigorated god of war. You can see it, feel it, and hear it all the way from the hills of Indochina, from the shores of Formosa right over into the very heart of Europe itself. ...

Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity. The modern champions of communism have selected this as the time. And, ladies and gentlemen, the chips are down — they are truly down.

...

Ladies and gentlemen, can there be anyone here tonight who is so blind as to say that the war is not on? Can there be anyone who fails to realize that the communist world has said, "The time is now" — that this is the time for the showdown between the democratic Christian world and the commu- 2

nist atheistic world? Unless we face this fact, we shall pay the price that must be paid by those who wait too long.

... As one of our outstanding historical figures once said, “When a great democracy is destroyed, it will not be because of enemies from without but rather because of enemies from within.” The truth of this statement is becoming terrifyingly clear as we see this country each day losing on every front.

At war’s end we were physically the strongest nation on Earth and, at least potentially, the most powerful intellectually and morally. Ours could have been the honor of being a beacon in the desert of destruction, a shining, living proof that civilization was not yet ready to destroy itself. Unfortunately, we have failed miserably and tragically to arise to the opportunity.

The reason why we find ourselves in a position of impotency is not because our only powerful, potential enemy has sent men to invade our shores, but rather because of the traitorous actions of those who have been treated so well by this nation. It has not been the less fortunate or members of minority groups who have been selling this nation out, but rather those who have had all the benefits that the wealthiest nation on earth has had to offer — the finest homes, the finest college education, and the finest jobs in government we can give.

This is glaringly true in the State Department. There the bright young men who are born with silver spoons in their mouths are the ones who have been worst.

... In my opinion the State Department, which is one of the most important government departments, is thoroughly infested with communists.

I have in my hand 57 cases of individuals who would appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party, but who nevertheless are still helping to shape our foreign policy.

...

This brings us down to the case of one Alger Hiss

As you hear this story of high treason, I know that you are saying to yourself, “Well, why doesn’t the Congress do something about it?” Actually, ladies and gentlemen, one of the important reasons for

the graft, the corruption, the dishonesty, the disloyalty, the treason in high government positions — one of the most important reasons why this continues — is a lack of moral uprising on the part of the 140 million American people. In the light of history, however, this is not hard to explain.

It is the result of an emotional hangover and a temporary moral lapse which follows every war. It is the apathy to evil which people who have been subjected to the tremendous evils of war feel. As the people of the world see mass murder, the destruction of defenseless and innocent people, and all of the crime and lack of morals which go with war, they become numb and apathetic. It has always been thus after war. However, the morals of our people have not been destroyed. They still exist. This cloak of numbness and apathy has only needed a spark to rekindle them. Happily, this spark has finally been supplied.

...

He has lighted the spark which is resulting in a moral uprising and will end only when the whole sorry mess of twisted warped thinkers are swept from the national scene so that we may have a new birth of national honesty and decency in government.

[Source: *Congressional Record*, 81st, 2nd, pt 2, 1954-56 / U.S. Senate, State Department Loyalty Investigation Committee on Foreign Relations, 81st Congress. Available online via *History Matters* (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6456>).]

← NSC-68 (1950)

Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Atoms for Peace” (1953) →