

From the Foner Reader - McCarthy

156. Joseph R. McCarthy on the Attack (1950)

Source: Congressional Record, 81st Congress, 2d Session, pt. 2, pp. 1954-56.

Soon after the announcement of the Truman Doctrine, the president instituted a loyalty review system in which government employees were required to demonstrate their patriotism without, in many cases, knowing the charges against them. But the individual whose name came to be most closely associated with the anticommunist crusade

was Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin. In a speech in West Virginia in February 1950, McCarthy stated that he had a list of 205 communists working for the State Department. The charge was preposterous; and a few days later, when he entered the speech in the *Congressional Record*, McCarthy reduced the number to 57—still a wild and unsubstantiated claim. The demagogic pursuit of communists riding roughshod over civil liberties came to be known as McCarthyism.

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 into two vast, increasingly hostile armed camps—a time of a great armaments race. . . .

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 show-down between the democratic Christian world and the Communist atheist world?

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

Six years ago, at the time of the first conference to map out the peace...there was within the Soviet orbit 180,000,000 people. Lined up on the antitotalitarian side there were in the world at that time roughly 1,625,000,000 people. Today, only six years later, there are 800,000,000 people under the absolute domination of Soviet Russia—an increase of over 400 percent. On our side, the figure has shrunk to around 500,000,000. In other words, in less than six years

the odds have changed from 9 to 1 in our favor to 8 to 5 against us. This indicates the swiftness of the tempo of Communist victories and American defeats in the cold war. . . .

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.

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. . . .

Questions

1. What kind of social resentments are evident in McCarthy's speech?
2. What evidence does McCarthy offer to support his claim that communists have infiltrated the State Department?