

Palmer Raids I

Lead: Just after 11:00 PM on the second of June, 1919 a bomb exploded in the entrance of the home of United States Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. The only victim was the bomber himself.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: It was no isolated incident. The bomb that shattered windows all over Mitchell's fashionable Washington neighborhood, including those of his neighbor Assistant Navy Secretary, Franklin Delano Roosevelt,

was part of campaign of similar attacks in eight other cities that night. In April, letter bombs had been mailed to thirty-six prominent Americans. Most were intercepted but the one mailed to former Georgia Senator Thomas Hardwick made it, blew off the hands of the maid who opened it and severely wounded the Senator's wife.

This run of violence came at the crest of widespread concern in the country over the Russian Revolution. People began to imagine Communists coming out of the woodwork. With absolutely no evidence, the New York Times laid the blame for the Mitchell bombing at the feet of Bolsheviks. This furor tended to focus on recent

European immigrants, many of whom had radical, socialist, or Marxist political views. Palmer declared a legal and cultural war on radicals of all stripes, and in congressional hearings on the bombings asserted there was a vast conspiracy to overthrow the government set for July 4th that year.

July 4th came and went with no revolution but Congress had voted \$500,000 to deal with the crisis and the Attorney General set out to spend the money by going after radicals. He appointed twenty-four-year-old J. Edgar Hoover to lead a new General Intelligence Division to conduct domestic counterespionage. A former librarian, Hoover began to collect information about radical and socialist

leaders. By 1921 he had nearly half-million cross-referenced note cards each describing radicals or their organizations. In addition, detailed biographies were compiled on important leaders who had any connections with ultra-radical movements. This information was used to prepare for raids against radical and communist organizations planned for November 7, 1919 on the two-year anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Next time: The Palmer Raids.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts .

Resources

**Gentry, Curt. *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets*.
New York, NY: Norton Publishing Company, 1991.**

**Powers, Richard Gid. *Secrecy and Power: The Life of J.
Edgar Hoover*. New York, NY: Free Press, 1987.**

**Theoharis, Athan G. *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the
Great American Inquisition*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple
University Press, 1966.**

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