

Politics of the Roaring Twenties

1. Read the section review.
- As you read: underline/highlight important terms, people, events.
3. Circle any words you don't know/understand.
4. Ask questions in margins about information.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW Americans lash out at those who are different while they enjoy prosperity and new conveniences produced by American businesses.

● Americans Struggle with Postwar Issues

MAIN IDEA A desire for normality after the war and a fear of communism and "foreigners" led to postwar isolationism.

Events in faraway Russia had an effect on the United States after World War I. Massive protests led the Russian ruler to step down from the throne in March 1917. In November of that year, radicals seized the government and established the world's first Communist state. Soon, this new government issued a call for worldwide revolution. Its leaders wanted to overthrow the capitalist system and abolish private property.

About 70,000 people, called "Reds," joined the new Communist party in the United States. Though their numbers were small, their radicalism and threats aroused fear among many people. As a "Red Scare" swept the nation, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer decided to remove the threat.

Palmer formed a new agency in the Justice Department to find and punish radicals. His agents arrested Communists, Socialists, and anarchists, who opposed any government at all. The agents often disregarded the rights of the people they arrested. Hundreds of radicals were sent out of the country without a trial. But Palmer never found evidence of a conspiracy to overthrow the government, and the fear passed.

The U.S. was actually becoming isolationist again—pulling away from world affairs. Dislike of foreigners resulted in a new immigration law. With the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, Congress limited the number of people admitted into the country each year. A revised version passed in 1924 cut the flow of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. It put a stop to Japanese immigration altogether. In 1929, Congress voted to further limit the number of immigrants admitted each year.

Many suffered in the hysteria. A celebrated case involved two Italian immigrants, Nicola Sacco and

Bartolomeo Vanzetti. The pair—both admitted radicals—were arrested for a double murder during a robbery in Massachusetts. Although the case was not strong, they were convicted and executed. Protests poured in from around the world.

The "Red Scare" revealed a general sense of unease in society, as did the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan began to flourish in the early 1920s. Klan leaders opposed African Americans, Jews, immigrants, and Catholics. By 1924, KKK membership numbered about 4.5 million, and the Klan helped elect officeholders in many states. Its popularity declined with increased criminal activity.

The postwar period also saw a revival of labor troubles. A strike of Boston police officers was forcefully put down by Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge. Violence erupted over a massive 1919 steel strike, with workers demanding the right to unionize. Steel makers labeled the workers as Communists, and the strike was broken in 1920. Later, a church group revealed the harsh conditions in steel mills. Embarrassed steel makers shortened the workday to eight hours. However, the steel workers still had no union.

United Mine Workers president John L. Lewis was able to win wage increases for coal miners. A. Philip Randolph also successfully organized an African-American union of railroad porters. Unions were not generally successful in the 1920s, however, as union membership dropped from about 5 million to about 3.5 million workers.

● The Harding Presidency

MAIN IDEA The Harding administration appealed to America's desire for calm and peace after the war, but resulted in scandal.

In the presidential election of 1920, Republicans nominated Warren G. Harding, a pleasant man of little ability. Harding and Calvin Coolidge swept into office in a landslide victory.