In this brief review of the work which the Department of Justice has undertaken, to tear out the radical seeds that have entangled American ideas in their poisonous theories, I desire not merely to explain what the real menace of communism is, but also to tell how we have been compelled to clean up the country.

Like a prairie-fire, the blaze of revolution was sweeping over every American institution of law and order a year ago. It was eating its way into the homes of the American workmen, its sharp tongues of revolutionary heat were licking the altars of the churches, leaping into the belfry of the school bell, crawling into the sacred corners of American homes, seeking to replace marriage vows with libertine laws, burning up the foundations of society.

Robbery, not war, is the ideal of communism. This has been demonstrated in Russia, Germany, and in America. As a foe, the anarchist is fearless of his own life, for his creed is a fanaticism that admits no respect of any other creed. Obviously it is the creed of any criminal mind, which reasons always from motives impossible to clean thought. Crime is the degenerate factor in society.

My information showed that communism in this country was an organization of thousands of aliens who were direct allies of Trotsky (a communist leader of the Russian Revolution). Aliens of the same misshapen caste of mind and indecencies of character, and it showed that they were making the same glittering promises of lawlessness, of criminal autocracy to Americans, that they had made to the Russian peasants. How the Department of Justice discovered upwards of 60,000 of these organized agitators of the Trotsky doctrine in the United States is the confidential information upon which the Government is now sweeping the nation clean of such alien filth...

. . . The whole purpose of communism appears to be a mass formation of the criminals of the world to overthrow the decency of private life, to usurp property that they have not earned, to disrupt the present order of life regardless of health, sex or religious rights. By a literature that promises the wildest dreams of such low aspirations, that can occur to only the criminal minds, communism distorts our social law....

The Department of Justice will pursue the attack of these "Reds" upon the Government of the United States with vigilance, and no alien, advocating the overthrow of existing law and order in this country, shall escape arrest and prompt deportation.

It is my belief that while they have stirred discontent in our midst, while they have caused irritating strikes, and while they have infected our social ideas with the disease of their own minds and their unclean morals we can get rid of them! and not until we have done so shall we have removed the menace of Bolshevism for good.

Source: A. Mitchell Palmer, "The Case Against the Reds," 1920


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Palmer Raids Activity

1. Cartoons A and B are from major American newspapers in 1919? Based on these cartoons, how would you describe the dominant mood of the country in 1919? Explain your answer.

2. What do you think the argument made by cartoon C is? What symbols help it make this argument?

3. What do you think the argument made by cartoon D is? What symbols help it make this argument?

4. Read document A. What events in world and US history might provide context (help us understand) the other documents and the mood they reflect? Explain.

5. Read Document B document in light of the other three documents. What is the main idea of this document? Highlight two passages that illustrate this idea.

6. What three words best describe all three documents - list and explain your reasons.
Write a paragraph that explains whether these documents are consistent with the American political ideals discussed in unit 1. Please provide examples from the documents themselves as part of your explanation.

The paragraph you write must contain three clear examples supporting your topic sentence. Be prepared to discuss your ideas in class tomorrow.