

[Bonus] AFD Ep 377 Links and Notes - The Red Ark [Bill/Rachel] - Recording May 25

Intro: This week our bonus episode is about the Red Ark also known as the Soviet Ark: the 1919 deportations of foreign-born Russian-American anarchists to the Soviet Union. We've kind of talked around this one in other episodes, and we definitely talked at length about laws criminalizing anarchist and syndicalist activities after World War I, but never done an episode directly on the Red Ark deportations. (As always, we will have all our sources posted in a PDF with the episode on [Patreon.com/arsenalfordemocracy](https://patreon.com/arsenalfordemocracy), and this week we're citing from various academic papers, government accounts, first-person narratives, and contemporary news articles, as well as some recent news articles and briefly some encyclopedia articles.) As we'll discuss today, this incident was the most famous of numerous deportations of Russian immigrants from the United States between the Russian Revolutions of 1917 and the end of 1920 and the conclusion of the Wilson Administration. Some accounts say thousands were deported, while other accounts merely say thousands were arrested but only several hundred were actually deported, although this discrepancy might be ([see p.3 of this paper](#)) due to some deportees being removed under different laws and thus counted separately. After 1920, the flow of political immigration essentially reversed as White Russians and others fleeing the Russian Civil War were welcomed to the United States among other countries. So let's get into some background about the Red Ark deportations in 1919, and then after I get through that, Rachel is going to walk us through the narratives on the Red Ark voyage itself.

<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/polish-russian/soviet-exiles/>

- Two key changes to the law made in 1918 allowed for these extraordinary political deportations of people who had in some cases been living in the US for a generation: 1) Added to [longstanding but barely enforced immigration restrictions on anarchists](#) were powers to deport immigrants for their political views and organizational memberships, and 2) There was no longer a protection for length of time living in the US:
 - *In 1918, Congress eliminated the landing limits, permitting the deportation of foreigners no matter how long they had resided in the United States. This elimination of landing limits enabled the mass deportation of foreigners in the wake of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's raids and arrests of anarchists and radicals in 1919. Emma Goldman was one of these deportees. Despite having lived in the United States for over thirty years, Goldman was deported to Russia with 249 foreign radicals on the S.S. Buford, the "Red Ark."*
<https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1475&context=iijgls>
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Act_of_1918

- New York Times Dec 13 1919: *HUNDREDS OF REDS ON SOVIET 'ARK' SAIL SOON FOR RUSSIA; United States Transport Will Start Within Ten Days with Load of Anarchists. GOLDMAN GOES WITH THEM Withdraws Her Appeal, Saying She Prefers Jail or Deportation to Ellis Island. [...] Goldman Withdraws Appeal Prefers Jail to Ellis Island. HUNDREDS OF REDS SOON OFF FOR RUSSIA [...] RED MEETING FORBIDDEN. Two Thousand Persons Dispersed by Police in the Bronx. A United States transport will leave this port within ten days for Russia carrying several hundred Russian Reds held for deportation. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman will be among them.*

<https://www.nytimes.com/1919/12/13/archives/hundreds-of-reds-on-soviet-ark-sail-soon-for-russia-united-states.html>

- The Raid on the Union of Russian Workers in New York City:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Palmer-Raids> On November 7, 1919 (the second anniversary of the Bolshevik takeover of Russia), U.S. federal and local authorities raided the headquarters of the Union of Russian Workers in New York City and arrested more than 200 individuals. On November 25 a second raid on the Union of Russian Workers headquarters unveiled a false wall and a bomb factory, confirming suspicions that the union harboured revolutionary

intentions. Palmer believed that the way to deal with the radicals was to deport the immigrants. On December 21, 249 radicals, including anarchist Emma Goldman, were packed aboard the USS Buford, which the press dubbed the Soviet Ark, and deported to Russia.

- Socialist publication "New York Call" [recounted](#) the November 7 1919 raid, which one survivor compared to a Cossack attack back home in Russia: A witness of the event said that he saw one of the Russians trying to rush out of the building, his face and clothing covered with blood. Agonized cries were heard.

One who was close to the scene while the raiders were covering themselves with the blood of men and women against whom no crime had been charged heard heavy thuds as of clubs descending on human flesh.

All who attempted to escape were driven back into the building, and none but officers were permitted to enter. Two Call reporters who attempted to gather the facts of the assault were threatened with arrest if they did not leave at once. One policeman on the stoop of the building shouted to the crowd that had collected outside: 'If there's a soldier among you, get after them!'

They were beaten, not only with clubs, but with blackjacks. After the police and other guardians of law had their fill of clubbing and blackjacking, they crowded the Russians together in the back of the hall and cross-examined them. Then they bandaged the heads of those who had suffered more than others, but even the bandages were heavily bloodstained. Meanwhile, patrol wagons which had been stationed in the neighborhood came clanging up and were filled as fast as they appeared with the Russians who had been beaten up. Most of them had their heads bandaged.

They were thrown down steps of the stoop without ceremony. One of them moaned loudly and the crowd outside mimicked him. The crowd was not permitted to approach too closely and a Call reporter was unable to see what marks had been made by the clubs of the police on the faces of the assaulted men and women.

- Some further context and analysis from me (Bill) via some info in the URW wiki article: The URW had only existed for less than a dozen years, having been initiated in 1908 by refugees of the failed Russian Revolution of 1905 and being more concerned with Russian domestic politics and opposition to the Tsar than with the domestic politics of the United States and Canada, apart from gestures toward solidarity with common struggle. Its ideology, depending on who or when you asked, was somewhere between anarcho-communist and anarcho-syndicalist. In many ways it mostly served as a community organization and resource for acclimating recent arrivals from Russia, including English language lessons, but local police and federal authorities gradually became obsessed with the idea after the Russian Revolutions of 1917 that they were patient zero for an outbreak of far-left radicalism in the US. The New York Times enthusiastically accused the group of dispersing 500 propagandists around the country to convert some 2 million Slavic immigrants to a mission of overthrowing the US government on behalf of the Soviets. This of course completely elided the numerous distinctions between the eight or so major Slavic ethno-linguistic groups present in the United States in any great number as of the 1920 Census. Their Russian-language newspaper had a circulation of less than 5,000 copies and their most pro-Soviet leaders or editors had already returned to Russia to serve the communist war effort:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_of_Russian_Workers

- [Rachel] <http://todayinrh.com/?event=red-ark-sails-emma-goldman-248-others-deported>
 - On December 21, 1919, 249 foreign-born radicals embarked from New York City aboard the USAT Buford. They were deported for their anarchist beliefs and many were swept up in the first wave of Palmer Raids. A majority of the workers were members of the Union of Russian Workers, one of the major targets of A. Mitchell Palmer and J. Edgar Hoover.
 - Two famous radicals were also aboard: Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, who had been arrested for opposing the draft in 1917. Their notoriety was used to paint all the deportees with the same radical brush.
- [Rachel] <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/11/11/when-america-tried-to-deport-its-radicals>
 - Sick burn from Emma Goldman to J. Edgar Hoover: *Haven't I given you a square deal, Miss Goldman?" Hoover asked, as they steamed toward Brooklyn in the darkness.*
"Oh, I suppose you've given me as square a deal as you could," she replied, two hours away from being ejected from the country where she had lived for thirty-four years and found the voice that had won her admirers around the world.
"We shouldn't expect from any person something beyond his capacity."
 - Also present for the send-off was Rep. Albert Johnson (WA), who chaired the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, and was a vociferous opponent of immigration, as well as an anti-Semite and a friend of the KKK.
 - Although J. Edgar Hoover was only 24 at the time, he used the clampdown on radicalism to amass power, heading the Radical Division of the Justice Department and collecting intel on subversive targets. Palmer and Hoover had friends in Congress such as the aforementioned Rep. Johnson, and used their sympathies to give them money and the authority to carry out these raids.
- Berkman, listeners might recall, had served 14 years in prison for attempted assassination of Henry Clay Frick in 1892 at the Homestead Strike
- [Rachel] At this point, we need to talk more about the voyage itself: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USAT_Buford#Voyage (this section was mostly taken from Assistant US Labor Secretary Louis F. Post's *The deportations delirium of nineteen-twenty; a personal narrative of an historic official experience*. He's a part of this narrative because deportations were under the authority of the Immigration Bureau, which was part of the Labor Department. We will be discussing him and his politics more extensively in a future episode)
- Departed at 6 A.M. from New York Harbor. Captain didn't even know the destination, and he only found out about the approximate destination after opening sealed order 24 hours after departure. He learned what the final destination was while in Kiel Harbor in Germany for repairs and to hire a German pilot to navigate the North Sea, which still had mines from WWI. Although the State Department had initially tried for a Latvian landing, this proved too difficult, and Finland was ultimately chosen. The Buford landed at Hanko, Finland January 17, 1920. From there, the deportees were held overnight 30 people to a boxcar, with no heat and only minimal food rations. Departing Hanko on January 18, they headed for Terijoki, Finland, two miles from the Russian border. Once there, after a brief parlay between Berkman and the Russians, the deportees were allowed to cross into Russia. Goldman and Berkman were the last to cross the border, waiting until everyone else had already crossed. The Russians welcomed them enthusiastically, with cheering and a band playing the Russian national anthem.
- Both Goldman and Berkman wrote of the journey:

- Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia*:

For twenty-eight days we were prisoners. Sentries at our cabin doors day and night, sentries on deck during the hour we were daily permitted to breathe the fresh air. Our men comrades were cooped up in dark, damp quarters, wretchedly fed, all of us in complete ignorance of the direction we were to take.

- Berkman, *The Russian Tragedy*

- *We were prisoners, treated with military severity, and the Buford a leaky old tub repeatedly endangering our lives during the month's Odyssey... Long, long was the voyage, shameful the conditions we were forced to endure: crowded below deck, living in constant wetness and foul air, fed on the poorest rations.*