

[Bonus] AFD Ep 379 Links and Notes - Louis F. Post

On this week's bonus episode, we are discussing Louis F. Post, Assistant Labor Secretary during the post-WWI Red Scare, and Acting Labor Secretary during the 1920 deportation craze. We previously mentioned him during last week's bonus episode on The Red Ark, as well as our recent episode on the Emergency Quotas Act of 1921, and we wanted to talk more about what an unusual figure he was. Specifically we should explore his role as a counterbalance to the anti-radical fanaticism of A. Mitchell Palmer and J. Edgar Hoover. As we pointed out last week, it bears repeating that although the Justice Department carried out the Palmer Raids, the deportations were under the authority of the Immigration Bureau, which was part of the Labor Department. Post used his powers as Acting Labor Secretary to thoroughly investigate the conditions of the raids, and to extend constitutional rights to the potential deportees, eventually securing the release of many of the arrestees. Though his views weren't always popular, his convictions eventually swayed public sentiment, leading to investigations on the Palmer Raids.

- Early life

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/11/11/when-america-tried-to-deport-its-radicals>: *He was born on a New Jersey farm in 1849 and, though too young to serve in the Civil War, was imbued with abolitionist zeal. As a boy, he talked to the free black handyman who worked for his grandfather and noticed that the man had to eat at a separate table. As a young man, Post spent two years working in the South during Reconstruction and saw how white Southerners foiled all possibility of advancement for the former slaves who hoped for equal rights at last. He served as a court reporter in a series of South Carolina trials in which Ku Klux Klansmen were convicted of murder—only to see President Ulysses S. Grant pardon most of the Klansmen several months later. He returned North, where he became a prosecutor and then a private attorney in New York City. The work left him uninspired, but he acquired a keen sense of the law that he was able to put to extraordinary use decades later.*

- Serving under the first US Labor Secretary William B Wilson from 1913 - March 1921, serving for both Wilson administrations who we covered in a full episode in November 2020:

<http://arsenalfordemocracy.com/2020/12/01/nov-29-2020-william-b-wilson-first-labor-secretary-arsenal-for-democracy-ep-335/>

- <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/04/22/trump-emergency-suspend-immigration-history-200406>

- *Jarring economic instability, alongside very real labor unrest and radical incitement at home, offered immigration opponents an opening. The unrest of 1919 led to a “Red Scare” that saw thousands of immigrant radicals deported and many more arrested and imprisoned. Louis Post, the assistant secretary of Labor, deemed the reaction a “deportation delirium”...*

- <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/11/11/when-america-tried-to-deport-its-radicals>

- *Two and a half months after the Buford [or Red Ark] had sailed, and just as the two men were hoping to deport many more shiploads of newly arrested “undesirables,” the Secretary of Labor went on leave, to tend to an illness in the family; his replacement resigned; and a seventy-year-old man named Louis F. Post became the acting Secretary of Labor.*
- *In charge of the Department of Labor [temporarily due to a brief absence by Secretary William Wilson?], Post proved a shrewd investigator and decisive reformer. When he discovered that many of the raids had been made without warrants, or with warrants based on faulty information, he invalidated nearly three thousand of the arrests. He found that prisoners had been questioned without being informed that their answers could be used as evidence against them and*

without being given access to lawyers. In response, he ruled that any alien subjected to the deportation process was entitled to full constitutional safeguards. Post learned that many people taken in the raids hadn't known that one of the Communist parties listed them as members; these factions had seceded from the Socialist Party and were intent on claiming as large a membership as possible. He ordered the release of many of those still held in immigration prisons like the one on Ellis Island; he slashed the amount of bail for others. Palmer and Hoover were furious.

- Resistance to deportations: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Act_of_1918 After more than 4,000 alleged anarchists were arrested for deportation under the act, the Department of Labor released most of those arrested. Acting Secretary of Labor Louis Freeland Post was threatened with impeachment for his department's findings in favor of continued residence in the US of persons charged in deportation cases.[8] A total of 556 persons were eventually deported under the Immigration Act of 1918.
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_F._Post
 - As early as January 1920, the [Bureau of Investigation](#) ... began compiling a file on Post and his political leanings, but failed to find substantive evidence of radical connections on his part.^[2] Nevertheless, the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization compiled a sensational report of Post's deportation decisions. When it leaked, the press made much of the affair, what Post later called "a newspaper cyclone of misrepresentation," though some coverage supported him.^[11] Some Congressmen traded speeches on his culpability, Committee Chairman [Albert Johnson](#) of Washington state attacking Post, and Congressman [George Huddleston](#) of Alabama defending him.^[12] On April 15, 1920, Kansas Congressman [Homer Hoch](#) accused Post of having abused his power and called for his [impeachment](#). The [House Committee on Rules](#) planned to ask the President to remove Post instead of impeaching him, so Post requested and was granted a chance to testify.^[13] He successfully defended his actions on May 7–8, attacking Attorney General Palmer and others. In a dramatic exchange, Congressman [Edward W. Pou](#), a Democratic supporter of the anti-radical campaign, praised Post's actions—"I believe you have followed your sense of duty absolutely"—and left the room in stunned silence. The Rules Committee took no further action.^{[2][14]}
 - After the Attorney General had spent 2 days reading a statement in his defense, the [New York Evening Post](#) gave Post the victory.^[15]
 - "The simple truth is that Louis F. Post deserves the gratitude of every American for his courageous and determined stand in behalf of our fundamental rights. It is too bad that in making this stand he found himself at cross-purposes with the Attorney General, but Mr. Palmer's complaint lies against the Constitution and not against Mr. Post."
 - The [American Legion](#) later sought Post's dismissal in a letter to President Wilson on December 31, 1920. The White House responded with a letter quoting Labor Secretary Wilson who endorsed Post's actions, detailed the Constitutional principles that guided him, and praised his adherence to Department policies: "We will not deport anyone simply because he has been accused or because he is suspected of being a Red. We have no authority to do so under the law....Mr. Post...I am satisfied ranks among the ablest and best administrative officers in the Government service."^[16]
 - In retirement in 1923, he published *The Deportations Delirium of Nineteen-Twenty: A Personal Narrative of an Historic Official Experience*, a detailed account of the raids, arrests, and deportations of 1919-20. He called the

entire effort "a stupendous and cruel fake".^[17] He asserted that his actions had been vindicated with the passage of time, that "no substantially erroneous decision of mine has yet been specified. Most certainly and without qualification may this be said of my cancellation decisions, and it was for these alone that my official fidelity was clamorously questioned.... Every attempt to show even one erroneous cancellation decision has utterly failed."

- <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1581&context=graddis> While initially garnering widespread support, by mid-1920 the Palmer Raids became known as a civil rights disaster when Louis Post, the Acting Secretary of Labor (who had been accused by Palmer of being too lenient on those arrested), testified to Congress about the unconstitutionality of the arrests and deportations.
- https://illinoisstatesociety.typepad.com/photos/1917_1930_illinois_state_/louis_post.html
 - He was himself considered a radical and a social friend of the anarchist Emma Goldman but it was Post who signed the deportation order to exile Goldman during the Red Scare. Goldman never forgave him and wrote with bitter antagonism toward Post in her 1935 autobiography.
- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jamerethnhist.38.1.0062?seq=1>
 - From the abstract: Although this action has long been remembered as a triumph of US civil liberties, this article argues that Post's objections to the deportations were grounded in his concern with the growing capabilities of mechanized bureaucracy and the tendency of these managerial technologies to discourage informed adjudication. Rather than opposing laws that would allow for the deportation of political radicals, Post vocally protested the "sign on the dotted line" style of governance he was expected to enact. As a result of his inaction, participants at every level of the emerging gate-keeping and immigration system objected to Post's inability to let the deportation "machine" run.