

INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING CONDUCT ON RAIDS

ISSUED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

1920

On June 2, 1919, bombs exploded in eight cities, including one bomb that damaged the home of the Attorney General of the United States, A. Mitchell Palmer. The following November, Palmer launched a series of raids against the radicals (including Communists, socialists, and anarchists) he held responsible for the bombs. On January 2, simultaneous raids in 33 cities led to the arrest of 2,000 alleged radicals. The next morning, the *New York Times* published the following list of instructions given to arresting officers. By March 1920, thousands of people had been rounded up in "Palmer Raids." Those arrested were often beaten, held without hearings and deported without trials.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY : Drawing Conclusions

What do the instructions for the raids reveal about Palmer's attitudes toward Communists?

INSTRUCTIONS

Our activities will be directed against the radical organizations known as the Communist Party of America and the Communist Labor Party of America, also known as Communists.

The strike will be made promptly and simultaneously at 8:30 P.M. in all districts. The meeting places of the Communists in your territory, and the names and addresses of the officers and heads that you are to arrest, are on the attached lists.

You will also arrest all active members where found.

Particular efforts should be made to apprehend all the officers irrespective of where they may be, and, with respect to such officers, their residence should be searched and in every instance all literature, membership cards, records and correspondence are to be taken.

When a citizen is arrested as a Communist, he must be present with the officers searching his home at the time of the search.

Meeting rooms should be thoroughly searched.

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Locate and obtain the charter. All records, if not found in the meeting rooms, will probably be found in the home of the Recording Secretary or Financial Secretary, but in every instance, if possible, records should be found and taken.

All literature, books, papers, pictures on the walls of the meeting places, should be gathered together and tagged with tags which will be supplied you, with the name and address of the person by whom obtained and where obtained.

In searching meeting places, a thorough search should be made and the walls sounded.

It is an order of the Government that violence to those apprehended should be scrupulously avoided.

Immediately upon the apprehension of the alien, or citizen, search him thoroughly. If found in groups in a meeting room, they should be lined up against the wall and searched. Particular efforts should be made to obtain membership cards on the persons who are taken.

Make an absolute search of the individual. No valuables, such as jewelry and moneys, to be taken away from those arrested.

After a search has been made of the person arrested you will take all the evidence you have obtained from his person and place in an envelope, which will be furnished you, placing the name, address, contents of the envelope, by whom taken and where, on the outside of the envelope and deliver to me with the alien.

Everybody will remain on duty until relieved, without exception.

Flashlights, string, tags and envelopes should be carried, as per instructions.

In searching rooms of an alien pay particular attention to everything in the room and make a thorough search thereof.

You are also warned to take notice "that no violence is to be used."

You will communicate with me by telephone from your several districts, the number of the telephone herewith given.

Attached you will find a list of those to be apprehended in your district, and you will also apprehend all those found arrested with these names at the time of the arrest whom you find to be active members of the Communist Party.

You are also instructed to use reasonable care and good judgment.

Source: "Raiders Ordered to Make Cleanup Thorough; Warned Against Violence or Taking Valuables," in the *New York Times*, January 3, 1920, p. 1.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY : ANSWER

Students may answer that these instructions for raids reveal Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's zealous hostility toward Communists. Students may cite as evidence the thorough searches of homes, meeting places, and individuals prescribed by these instructions. They may also note that it appears he believed there was a nationwide Communist conspiracy, because he ordered that so many people be arrested. Students may also argue that agents are reminded twice that they cannot use violence against those arrested, which suggests that they have done so in past raids.