

Parrish's views prevailed. And three years later, Congress permanently limited European immigration to 150,000 per year, distributed according to a series of national quotas that severely restricted the numbers from southern and eastern Europe. The law aimed to ensure that descendants of the old immigrants forever outnumbered the children of the new. The law also barred the entry of all those ineligible for naturalized citizenship—that is, the entire population of Asia, even though Japan had fought on the American side in World War I. The quota system remained in place until the immigration reform act of 1965.

MR. PARRISH: We should stop immigration entirely until such a time as we can amend our immigration laws and so write them that hereafter no one shall be admitted except he be in full sympathy with our Constitution and laws, willing to declare himself obedient to our flag, and willing to release himself from any obligations he may owe to the flag of the country from which he came.

It is time that we act now, because within a few short years the damage will have been done. The endless tide of immigration will have filled our country with a foreign and unsympathetic element. Those who are out of sympathy with our Constitution and the spirit of our Government will be here in large numbers, and the true spirit of Americanism left us by our fathers will gradually become poisoned by this uncertain element.

The time once was when we welcomed to our shores the oppressed and downtrodden people from all the world, but they came to us because of oppression at home and with the sincere purpose of making true and loyal American citizens, and in truth and in fact they did adapt themselves to our ways of thinking and contributed in a substantial sense to the progress and development that our civilization has made. But that time has passed now; new and strange conditions have arisen in the countries over there; new and strange doctrines are being taught. The Governments of the Orient are being overturned and destroyed, and anarchy and bolshevism are threatening the very foundation of many of them, and no one can

133. Congress Debates Immigration (1921)

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Fears of foreign radicalism sparked by the labor upheavals immediately following World War I and the increased concern with Americanizing immigrants greatly strengthened pressures for wholesale immigration restriction. In 1921, Congress debated a proposal to limit immigration from Europe temporarily to 357,000 per year (one third the annual average before the war). The excerpt that follows, from April 20, 1921, pitted Congressman Lucien W. Parrish, a Democrat from Texas, an advocate of immigration restriction, against Meyer London, a Socialist from New York and himself an immigrant from Poland.

foretell what the future will bring to many of those countries of the Old World now struggling with these problems.

Our country is a self-sustaining country. It has taught the principles of real democracy to all the nations of the earth; its flag has been the synonym of progress, prosperity, and the preservation of the rights of the individual, and there can be nothing so dangerous as for us to allow the undesirable foreign element to poison our civilization and thereby threaten the safety of the institutions that our forefathers have established for us.

Now is the time to throw about this country the most stringent immigration laws and keep from our shores forever those who are not in sympathy with the American ideas. It is the time now for us to act and act quickly, because every month's delay increases the difficulty in which we find ourselves and renders the problems of government more difficult of solution. We must protect ourselves from the poisonous influences that are threatening the very foundation of the Governments of Europe; we must see to it that those who come here are loyal and true to our Nation and impress upon them that it means something to have the privileges of American citizenship. We must hold this country true to the American thought and the American ideals. . . .

MR. LONDON: . . . This bill is a continuation of the war upon humanity. It is an assertion of that exaggerated nationalism which never appeals to reason and which has for its main source the self-conceit of accumulated prejudice.

At whom are you striking in this bill? Why, at the very people whom a short while ago you announced you were going to emancipate. We sent 2,000,000 men abroad to make the world "safe for democracy," to liberate these very people. Now you shut the door to them. Yes. So far, we have made the world safe for hypocrisy and the United States incidentally unsafe for the Democratic Party, temporarily at least. [Laughter.] The supporters of the bill claim that the law will keep out radicals. The idea that by restricting immigration you will prevent the influx of radical thought is altogether untenable. . . .

Ideas can neither be shut in nor shut out. There is only one way of contending with an idea, and that is the old and safe American rule of free and untrammelled discussion. Every attempt to use any other method has always proven disastrous.

While purporting to be a temporary measure, just for a year or so, this bill is really intended to pave the way to permanent exclusion.

To prevent immigration means to cripple the United States. Our most developed industrial States are those which have had the largest immigration. Our most backward States industrially and in the point of literacy are those which have had no immigration to speak of.

The extraordinary and unprecedented growth of the United States is as much a cause as the effect of immigration.

Defenders of this bill thoughtlessly repeat the exploded theory that there have been two periods of immigration, the good period, which the chairman of the committee fixes up to the year 1900, and the bad period since. The strange thing about it is that at no time in history has any country made such rapid progress in industry, in science, and in the sphere of social legislation as this country has shown since 1900.

The new immigration is neither different nor worse, and besides that, identically the same arguments were used against the old immigration.

By this bill we, who have escaped the horrors of the war, will refuse a place of refuge to the victims of the war.

I repeat, this is an attempt at civilization. Progress is by no means a continuous or uninterrupted process. Many a civilization has been destroyed in the tortuous course of history and has been followed by hundreds or thousands of years of darkness. It is just possible that unless strong men who love liberty will everywhere assert themselves, the world will revert to a state of savagery. Just now we hear nothing but hatred, nothing but the ravings of the exaggerated I—"I am of the best stock, I do not want to be contaminated; I have produced the greatest literature; my intellect is the biggest; my heart is the noblest"—and this is repeated in every

parliament, in every country, by every fool all over the world.
[Applause.]

Questions

1. Why does Parrish consider continued immigration dangerous?
2. Why does London argue that immigration restriction is based on "prejudice" rather than "reason"?