

Have You No Decency, Sir?

One of my Facebook friends who is also extremely right wing in his political beliefs called me a communist. It was because I defended Senator Tammy Duckworth against Tucker Carlson of Fox News who said she was not a patriot and that she hated America. Duckworth lost both of her legs during the Iraq War. That name calling reminded me of Joe McCarthy, so I did some more research. I found that the US Army had been accused of harboring communists. On 9 June 1954, when the Army was before McCarthy's Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, chief counsel Joseph Nye Welch asked Wisconsin Senator McCarthy "At long last, have you left no sense of decency?" What led to this event and why is it important? It occurred during a time of the fear of Communism was rampant in several segments of the US populace. McCarthy a Republican Senator from Wisconsin took it as his cause and lead a campaign of fear of communist influence on American institutions and espionage by Soviet agents. Interestingly, it actually started in 1947 with an executive order from President Truman to screen federal employees for association with organizations deemed "totalitarian, fascist, communist or subversive or advocating to alter the form of Government of the US by unconstitutional means." It was a time of unrest in the world. Russia did its first test of an atomic bomb, China had fallen to a communist revolution, the Korean War was about to start and a high-level State Department official, Alger Hiss was convicted of perjury in an espionage case. With this background, Senator McCarthy at a political speech in Wheeling, West Virginia on 9 February 1950 said "Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity. The modern champions of communism have selected this as the time. And, ladies and gentlemen, the chips are down—they are truly down." He claimed to have a list of over 200 State Department employees who were communist. During the next few years, hundreds of Americans were accused of being communists or communist sympathizers. The end started when McCarthy accused the US Army of having communist in their ranks and the Army was called before the Senate committee. Televised hearings of McCarthy's investigation into the U.S. Army let the American people see his bullying tactics and lack of credibility in full view for the first time, and he quickly lost support. The Senate censured him shortly thereafter and he died in 1957.

As I was researching this, I decided I had to listen to the Chad Mitchell Trio's song of 1962 'The John Birch Society' and its famous verse 'if your mommy is a commie, then you got to turn her in.' You can find it with the lyrics on YouTube.