

Ukraine, Russia and the Sporting McCarthyites

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Global Research, March 23, 2022

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

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The cultural vandals and iconoclasts have been busy of late, removing Russians from the stables at short notice and demanding what might be called a necessary affirmation of disloyalty. It’s all good to talk about world peace and the resolution of disputes, but that will hardly do for the flag-bearing choirs who have discovered their object of evil. Do you hate Vladimir Putin? If so, good. Do you love freedom? Well, of course, as everyone does with squeaking enthusiasm, even if they cannot define it.

The main interest is never in the second answer, but the first. Putin must be condemned and banished from your conscience, your mind and history. Ignore the fact that he is the elected leader of a country - he remains a tyrant to be condemned to liberal democratic execration. Best go about punishing people innocent of this fact.

Such a cringeworthy approach has seduced and trapped some able minds over the years. During the Cold War, the division of camps and ideologies demanded unthinking loyalty, not so much to truth but a version of it long lost in political drag and the hypocrisy of appearances. On September 22, 1947, delegates from Communist parties across the European spectrum [heard the infantile ravings](#) of the main Soviet delegate Andrei Zhdanov, who suggested with nether clenching tediousness that the world was divided between the “imperialist and democratic camp”. The US, allied with Great Britain and France, made up the former. “The anti-fascist forces comprise the second camp”, rooted in the USSR and its various, anomalously named “new democracies.”

In the United States, divisions were also being marked by the mind ravaging nature of ideological conformism. Executive Order 9835, issued by President Harry Truman, [focused](#) on whether “reasonable grounds exist for belief that the person involved is disloyal” with any organisation designated by the Attorney General to be “totalitarian, Fascist, Communist, or subversive”, or advocating or approving the forceful denial of constitutional rights to other persons or seeking “to alter the form of Government of the United States by unconstitutional means.”

The President’s Temporary Commission on Employee Loyalty (TCEL), packed with

representatives from six government departments overseen by Special Assistant to the Attorney General A. Devitt Vanech, [dealt with](#) assessing federal loyalty standards and developing procedures to expunge or disqualify “any disloyal or subversive person” from federal service.

In this atmosphere, the vulgar and coarse Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy operated, at least for a time, with pugnacious impunity, claiming in his infamous Wheeling, West Virginia speech that 57 communists had found their way into the US State Department. The House Un-American Activities Committee also worked aggressively to advance the spirit of demonisation, ruining careers and blackening reputations. The stupid tend to linger in political accusation.

The Ukraine War is now making Russian citizens, at the behest of various quarters, undertake acts of purification in various foreign theatres. They are being told to engage in crude demonstrations of loyalty (or, in some cases, disloyalty). Admit you hate Putin, and you can attend a tournament to earn your crust.

UK Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston has taken a keen interest in this daft effort, hoping to encourage the organisers of Wimbledon, the All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) to take a more severe approach to players from “pariah states”, as long as they do not include such angelic wonders as Saudi Arabia. Before a select parliamentary committee, Huddleston [noted](#) that, “Many countries have agreed that they will not allow representatives from Russia to compete. There are also visa issues as well. When it comes to individuals, that is more complex.”

Complexity and Huddleston do not get along. “We need some potential assurance that they are not supporters of Putin and we are considering what requirements we may need to try to get some assurances along those lines.”

Tennis player Daniil Medvedev and his colleagues are facing the prospect that not engaging in public denouncement of the Kremlin will be insufficient to enable them to compete. They are already not permitted to compete under the Russian flag, and they are being told that a Russian winning Wimbledon would be unpardonable for the glorious British tournament. Their country has already [been banned](#) from competing in team events such as the Davis Cup and Billie Jean King tournaments.

Across the sporting world, players from Russia now [see their country barred](#) by the International Ski Federation, Formula One, hosting the European Champions League Final, the indefensibly boring European curling championships and the International Biathlon Union.

Such expectations are so extreme as to remind one of Cold War parallels. An occasional voice of reason can be found, even if they come from an individual who has no reason to fear repercussions himself. Australian tennis commentator and former player Todd Woodbridge [told](#) Nine’s Sports Sunday that this line of reasoning placed one on “slippery and dangerous ground.” Everyone knew “they have families back in whatever part of Russia they are from, and you do not want to be on the wrong side of that, because your family will pay the price.”

Woodbridge is a reliably unworldly sort, but these are sensible, humane words lost in the feverish hysteria that will cake and cloak discussion in this field for months. From culture to

sporting fixtures, the smug, Putin hating establishment, under direction from their various advisors, are being told that denigrating and cancelling the representatives of Barbarian Rus is the way to go. Individuals will be crucified.

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Featured image: Daniil Medvedev's 'world peace' post on Instagram. (Instagram)

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