

demonstrations, publicity and legal defense is done primarily in the struggles of the organized labor and farmers movements.

### Questions

1. In what ways can the ACLU's statement be seen as a reaction against violations of civil liberties before and during World War I?
2. Why does the ACLU identify "organized movements of labor and of the farmers" as waging the "chief fight" for civil liberties in the United States?

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### 130. Bartolomeo Vanzetti's Last Statement in Court (1927)

*Source: Robert P. Weeks, ed., Commonwealth v. Sacco and Vanzetti (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1958), pp. 220–23.*

The trial and execution for murder of two Italian immigrant anarchists, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, became one of the most controversial events of the 1920s and sparked a worldwide movement to save the condemned men. Their trial in 1921 took place in an atmosphere of anti-immigrant and anti-radical hysteria and was marked by flagrant appeals to prejudice by the prosecution and bias by the presiding judge. To many immigrants, including those who did not share Sacco and Vanzetti's political views, the pair became symbols of the excesses of the anti-immigration movement that culminated in the 1924 law closing off entry for nearly all migrants from southern and eastern Europe. Overseas, the trial led to a transformation of the image of the United States from an asylum for liberty to a land where justice was perverted by the demands of the powerful. After six years of appeals, the two men were sentenced to death in 1927. Vanzetti's last statement in court reaffirmed his innocence and suggested some of the reasons for the verdict.

WHAT I SAY is that I am innocent... That I am not only innocent of these two crimes, but in all my life I have never stolen and I have never killed and I have never spilled blood... Everybody that knows these two arms knows very well that I did not need to go into the streets and kill a man or try to take money. I can live by my two hands and live well. But besides that, I can live even without work with my hands for other people. I have had plenty of chance to live independently and to live what the world conceives to be a higher life than to gain our bread with the sweat of our brow.

My father in Italy is in a good condition. I could have come back in Italy and he would have welcomed me every time with open arms. Even if I come back there with not a cent in my pocket, my father could have give me a position, not to work but to make business, or to oversee upon the land that he owns...

Not only have I struggled hard against crimes, but I have refused myself of what are considered the commodity and glories of life, the prides of a life of a good position, because in my consideration it is not right to exploit man. I have refused to go in business because I understand that business is a speculation on profit upon certain people that must depend upon the business man, and I do not consider that that is right and therefore I refuse to do that.

Now, I should say that I am not only innocent of all these things, not only have I never committed a real crime in my life—though some sins but not crimes—not only have I struggled all my life to eliminate crimes, the crimes that the official law and the moral law condemns, but also the crime that the moral law and the official law sanction and sanctify,—the exploitation and the oppression of the man by the man, and if there is a reason why I am here as a guilty man, if there is a reason why you in a few minutes can doom me, it is this reason and none else.

We were tried during a time whose character has now passed into history. I mean by that, a time when there was a hysteria of resentment and hate against the people of our principles, against the foreigner, against slackers, and it seems to me—rather, I am positive of

it, that both you [the judge] and Mr. Katzmann [the prosecutor] have done all what it were in your power in order to work out, in order to agitate still more the passion of the juror, the prejudice of the juror, against us. . . . Everybody ought to understand that the first beginning of our defense has been terrible. My first lawyer did not try to defend us. He has made no attempt to collect witnesses and evidence in our favor. . . .

My conviction is that I have suffered for things that I am guilty of. I am suffering because I am a radical and indeed I am a radical; I have suffered because I was an Italian, and indeed I am an Italian; I have suffered more for my family and for my beloved than for myself, but I am so convinced to be right that you can only kill me once but if you could execute me two times, and if I could be reborn two other times, I would live again to do what I have done already.

### Questions:

1. Why does Vanzetti feel that he did not receive a fair trial?
2. How do Vanzetti's political views come through in his statement?

## 131. Congress Debates Immigration (1921)

*Source: Congressional Record, 67th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 511-15.*

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.

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