

A Bugaboo That Will Get Us All



Arthur Hoppe

SCENE: The U.S. Bureau of Bugaboos. The director, Homer T. Pettibone, is showing a young management trainee, Stringfellow Bean, the historic exhibits.

Pettibone (rubbing his hands): The Bureau has a proud history, Bean, dating back to the founding of our country. As soon as we all became Americans, it found the very first Bugaboo amongst us: aliens.

Bean: Aliens, sir?

Pettibone: Yes, thanks to the Bureau's efforts, Congress in 1798 passed The Alien & Sedition Acts, which, for several years, actually made it a crime to criticize the government. Ah, those were the good old days!

Bean (looking puzzled): Yes, sir. And what's this here?

Pettibone: A stuffed Anarchist, Bean. Anarchists were very popular Bugaboos in the 1920s and 1930s — until we ran out of them.

Bean: A shame, sir.

Pettibone: Yes, but we replaced them. See this effigy of a Japanese-American? They served as excellent Bugaboos in the 1940s. Remember the Relocation Center?

Bean: Before my time, sir. What's this?

Pettibone: A well-preserved American Communist. A very rare specimen, Bean. In fact, they were very rare during the McCarthy Era in the 1950s, but we employed their limited numbers with extraordinary success.

Bean: Are we still using them, sir?

Pettibone: Very little. The public tired of them. Moreover, we discovered a far superior Bugaboo. In fact, if I do say so myself, it's the greatest Bugaboo in the Bureau's history. Take a look.

Bean: Ugh! what is it?

Pettibone (proudly): A criminal!

Bean: But there's always been criminals, sir.

Pettibone: Yes, but no one ever exploited them as The National Bugaboo before. With the rising crime rate, they became a natural. Few people ever saw a Communist. But criminals? With the help of the press, we've scared the country witless.

Bean (hesitantly): Excuse me, sir, but why do we need Bugaboos in the first place?

Pettibone (surprised): To scare people, of course.

Bean: Yes, but why scare people?

Pettibone (frowning): So they'll support repressive legislation, naturally. The more repressive legislation, the stronger the government. The stronger the government, the stronger the country. You are for a strong America, aren't you?

Bean (hastily): Oh, yes, sir! You bet!

Pettibone: Good. And look what the Criminal Bugaboo has done for us. The people, scared to death, are up in arms against the molly-coddling courts for giving the accused their legal rights. In the past five years, Congress, with the support of the frightened people, has passed The No-Knock Law, the Rap Brown Act and legislation authorizing wire taps without warrants, preventive detention and special grand juries — not to mention bills weakening the Fifth Amendment and overruling the Supreme Court.

Bean: A truly glorious record, sir. What's that last thing on the wall?

Pettibone (sternly): That, Bean, is The Enemy — the nemesis that has blocked the Bureau at every turn for 200 years. But final victory, thanks to The Criminal Bugaboo, is now in our grasp. Read it aloud, young man.

Bean: Yes, sir. "We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice . . ."