
John Reed, Bolshevik Envoy to the United States — A Character Sketch

by Max Eastman

Published in *The Evening Call* [New York], v. 11, no. 29 (Feb. 3, 1918), pg. 3.

John Reed's appointment as consul general to his own country by the Bolsheviki is the most beautiful and astute expression they have given yet to the international character of the class struggle and the Social Revolution. In his own country John Reed has been proscribed by the respectables, and indicted by the courts as a traitor. He will present his credentials from the sovereign proletariat of Russia to a bourgeois government that has plans already on foot to put him in jail.

When his absence was explained to Judge Mayer at our arraignment as conspirators against the United States of America, the judge said, "Is that the same Reed that testified in the Berkman case?"

[Attorney Morris] Hillquit told him it was.

"Well — you needn't be in a hurry about bringing him back. It might be a good thing if he stayed there."

It might be a good thing for the nationalistic capitalism that Judge Mayer serves if John Reed stayed in Russia. But it will be the best thing for industrial freedom that could happen if he comes back an accredited ambassador to the bourgeoisie from the international revolutionary working class symbolized and embodied in the Russian government. John Reed was born to fill a high place in revolutionary times. He is one of the few universal men — the men who combine that arrant imagination and headstrong will of



adventure which are the attributes of poetic genius, with a diligent and real power to achieve and understand. There is nothing that needs to be done, either in the technical routine of a consul general's office, or in the extraordinary and delicate duties of a revolutionary emissary, that John Reed is not abundantly equipped to do.

Milk-blooded people with a nearsighted morality, consisting principally of fear and decorum, when they see a young man so full of power and courage and poetry that he really sets out to live, always call him "wild" and "crazy" and "irresponsible." That is the way they talked about Reed when he left Harvard. They were jealous because he could dive higher than any of them, and dive deeper, too. And they knew he would. And he has.

I have known John Reed for 5 years — worked with him, learned of him, trusted him, and loved him. Starting off with brilliant, emotional perceptions, and word combinations in his mind like colors of flame, I have watched him add to these native and dangerous gifts the habit of verification and clear analytical understanding. I knew when we sent him to Russia we were sending a boon and counsellor to the revolution. And I know that his history — the intimate history — of those great days at Petrograd will be a light in the world's literature.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.