
Assembly Votes to Spend \$50,000 on Bolshevism Hunt: Socialists Ridicule Bill — Probe Sleeping Sickness, and Start with Legislature Is Claessens' Amendment — Save Money, We'll Tell You, Says Solomon

Unsigned article in the *New York Call*, vol. 12, no. 86 (March 27, 1919), pp. 1-2.

(Special to *The Call*.)

ALBANY, March 26 [1919].— The resolution to investigate Bolshevism in this state passed the Assembly today by a vote of 110 to 10. Several Assemblymen threatened in their remarks to vote in the negative, but their opposition failed to materialize on the roll call. Besides the Socialists, the following were recorded against the resolution: Assemblymen C.C. Johnson, Leininger, Lyons, McCue, McLaughlin, Mullen, O'Hare, and Schwab.

The attack on the resolution was opened by Assemblyman [August] Claessens, who offered an amendment which provided that the committee investigate the sleeping sickness. Explaining his amendment, Claessens said:

“I make this amendment in all seriousness. No doubt the spread of Bolshevism is a serious menace. But it is only an effect and every effect has a cause. We read in the newspapers about the sleeping sickness which is baffling medical science. The doctors are looking for the source of this disease. If they would visit this chamber, I believe they would find the epidemic originated right here.”

Claessens then referred to the poor attendance of members and the general indifference to the work of the house, and suggested that since it was the opinion of many that there was a direct connection between this condition and the spread of Bolshevism the expenditure provided for in the resolution might well be used to investigate the somnolence of the Legislature.

The amendment naturally provoked laughter, but, of course, was defeated. Then the real fight began.

Take It on Merits.

[Charles] Solomon, replying to the remarks of Assemblyman Kennedy, a trade unionist, to the effect that the American workers would have nothing to do with a thing so foreign as Bolshevism, reminded the House that trade unionism was really an importation, having first established itself in Europe.

“As far as I am concerned,” he continued, “if there is any virtue in Bolshevism, I don’t care whether it was born in Russia or Germany or anywhere else. I am ready to receive it with open arms for the virtue there is in it. The mere fact that it comes from a country other than our own is no argument against it, for the very language we employ in this chamber has its root in Europe.”

Solomon then pointed out there were probably as many conceptions of Bolshevism in the Legislature as there were members in both Houses. “Nevertheless,” he continued, “the vote will be practically unanimous. What a joke.”

The Socialist members then went on to indicate the looseness with which the term is generally employed.

Where Party Stands.

In reply to a question, Solomon declared: “To the extent that what you call Bolshevism is opposed to capitalist government, the Socialist Party as represented in this chamber is in agreement with that purpose, and you gentlemen can make the most of it.”

Solomon emphatically denied one of the provisions of the resolution to the effect that the United States Senate Committee which investigated Bolshevism [Overman Committee] adduced facts warranting an independent inquiry in this state. He referred to the list of “undesirables” submitted to the committee by Archibald E. Stevenson, directing the attention of the Assembly to the fact that it contained the names of some of the best known and most respected Americans, including Jane Addams, Prof. Charles Beard, Bishop [William Montgomery] Jones, Rev. Percy S. Grant, Rev. John Haynes Holmes, Rev. Judah L. Magnes, and others. He reminded the assemblymen that Secretary of War [Newton] Baker had repudiated Steven-

son, who had been represented as a member of the Military Intelligence Bureau, and asked: "Are we going to repeat this farce in the state of New York?"

He suggested the committee proposed in the resolution, or any other, would probably [get] more information than they would otherwise glean and save the state \$50,000, if they would invite the Socialist members to appear before it.

"If you want to stop the spread of what you call Bolshevism," Solomon went on, "stop wasting your time and study the causes of social discontent. You will find it in the high cost of living, in unemployment, in inadequate housing, in the intensity of the struggle for existence generally. While I have no desire to chide you, yet, as man to man, I ask you, what have you done to meet these conditions? I know the resolution will pass, not because every man and woman here takes it seriously, but because there are not enough here who have the courage of their convictions."

Claessens took the floor a second time, and explained how the term Bolshevism originated, giving its background in the Russian situation. He declared that, though he believed in and had always contended for political action, his experience in the Legislature was having a dampening effect on his enthusiasm for parliamentary means.

"If we don't come back here next year," he concluded, "it will not be because of any Democratic or Republican combination; it will be simply because the workers are losing hope as a result of their experiences with Legislatures."

Edited by Tim Davenport

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