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# Speech Honoring the 2nd Anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution: Brownsville Labor Lyceum, NYC — Nov. 7, 1919

by James Oneal

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Mr. Chairman and Comrades:—

We are meeting tonight on the Second Anniversary of the Second Revolution in Russia. We meet in the presence of the strangest conduct on the part of governments that the world has ever known.

There is no war being waged against Russia. If you ask the diplomats of England and of France and of the United States, they will tell you there is no war being waged against Soviet Russia. If you ask the administration in Washington whether the war is ended or not, President Wilson will say, "Yes, it is ended; the war is over in the case of Prohibition, but the war is on regarding the United Mine Workers."

War is on, and it is not on. There is no war against Russia, and there is a war against Russia.

Now, whether those men are drinking or not, I do not know, but to me they talk like men who are on a drunk and don't know what they are talking about at all.

However, it is not surprising to us, and during the short time that I shall occupy the platform, I want to draw some historical parallels.

It is said that the Russian Soviet Government is not a stable government, that chaos exists there, that it is undergoing a process of dissolution. As a matter of fact, Russia has had only two years, and despite the fact that Soviet Russia has had to face counterrevolutionists within, plot after plot, and efforts to wreck the

administration, efforts to destroy the industries, efforts to overthrow the government, despite this and despite the fact that Russia is facing some 12 or 13 nations at war with her, who have armed bandits endeavoring to surround Russia and cut her off from the world, despite the fact that Soviet Russia inherited a rotten regime of corruption from the Tsar, the breaking down of its economic life, famine stalking from Siberia to the Baltic, despite all these tremendous handicaps, with the imperialistic powers of the world trying to crush this working class Republic, she has survived it all, and the latest news shows us that even the armies in the Baltic, some of them, or at least part of them, are surrounded by the Soviet Red Guard.

In two years this tremendous drama has been going on in Russia, Russia coming out of the revolution of blood, with all these tremendous handicaps rising out of a world war that had practically ruined and wrecked a large part of Eastern and Central Europe. Yet Russia has her banners swung to this very hour, two years of it.

What happened in the United States in the Revolution that we are accustomed to glorify every Fourth of July? A revolution that began long before the Declaration of Independence, but in 1776 the war was on, seven years passed away, and it was 1783 before peace was realized between this country and Great Britain.

Seven years — a long struggle! Did that mean a

stabilized government in the United States? Not at all. All the historians tell us that the period from 1783 to 1789, that long period, was a period of chaos, disorder, violence, and dissolution. But note this, there was not armies of invasions across the Canadian border, no great imperialistic powers of Europe swarming bandits, arming Kolchaks and others, threatening the life of the infant Republic, no attempts at counterrevolution within the heart of the Republic itself, no army on the western border, no great fleets of battleships on the Atlantic seaboard and in the Gulf of Mexico to cut off all foodstuffs and all supplies. The infant Republic of the United States had an absolute free deal, giving it time in which to rebuild its institutions.

And yet the peace declared in 1783 was a peace that almost involved the dissolution of the revolutionary government, in the winter of 1786 and 1787, during that period there were rebellions of workers and farmers, skilled mechanics, farm laborers and farmers in Vermont and Massachusetts, in New Hampshire, all through the New England states — revolts and uprisings that almost overthrew the revolutionary government.

It required some 15 years from the beginning of the revolution, 15 years mark you, before a central Federal Government was established; and the government had finally become a stable, orderly thing, such as we know it is today.

I say to you here tonight, not only as a native-born worker of the United States, but as an International Socialist, that if it required 15 years for a revolutionary government to be established in the United States to kick the British power across the Atlantic Ocean, then I say to you that it is reasonable that Russia, in the midst of the worldwide chaos, deserves at least 10 years before there be any condemnation of her.

But, they say, that there have been violences in Russia. Some violence in a revolution! Do they think a revolution is a pink tea party, for men and women to gather around the table and say, “Now, let us have a revolution. Have a drink with me. Let us have a drink. Let us drink to the success of the revolution” — and then you go out and slap a Bolshevik on the wrist, and say, “Please depart; we want a little revolution.” (*Laughter.*) Is that the way you have a revolution?

Every tremendous appeal in the world’s history that has brought about new institutions, every great

revolution, the French Revolution, the American Revolution, the Russian Revolution — all such revolutions have been accompanied with more or less violence, and it is impossible to dispense with it.

What about their own American Revolution? Was that a pink tea affair? No violence? No mobbing? No clubbing? No property confiscated? Read the *New York Times*. The politicians, the diplomats in Washington, misrepresent and misinterpret American history itself. In the American Revolution we had some radicals at that time. You know radicals are out of date nowadays. We had some people at that time that Moderns would call Bolsheviks.

For example: the Sons of Liberty, organized first in Boston, spread through the New England states and as far south as Baltimore. Who were the Sons of Liberty? Why, those were the Red Guards of the American Revolution — that is who they were! (*Applause.*) What did they do? They organized, to insure that the revolution would be a success. They were composed largely, or to some extent, of lawyers and in a few cases of ministers, but largely of farmers and laborers and mechanics, working men, organized in the Sons of Liberty.

And do you know what they did? Well, whenever they found a Loyalist — and today, if you are a Loyalist, you are all right, that is, if you are loyal to Gary and Rockefeller, to that gang, you are all right — but a Loyalist was in those days in very bad odor, he was an undesirable citizen; and where they found a man who was loyal to Great Britain — they were generally merchants and wealthy men — do you know what those early Bolsheviks did? Why, they simply got a lot of rags, and they set them on fire, placed them in a household where the man and his family happened to live, together with his servants, and filled his house with this stinking smoke and drove him out of the house. That is what they did.

In other cases, they simply took a Loyalist out into the woods, treated him to a coat of tar and feathers, and took possession of his home — took possession of his home and household. They mobbed thousands and thousands of these British Loyalists. They deported, they exiled thousands and thousands of them to Canada. They took possession of their property, confiscated their property, and in some cases many of these British Loyalists were killed, lost their lives in the

American Revolution.

And here are the newspaper editors, here are the politicians, here are the professional patriots and officials at Washington, holding up their hands in holy horror because a lot of the Tsarist vermin have been driven out of Russia and their property has been confiscated, and the working class are at least free. Why, we had exactly the same things in the American Revolution.

What is the one thing they glorify in the schools to this day? Why, the Boston Tea Party, isn't it? What was the Boston Tea Party? The Boston Tea Party was nothing more or less than this: a group of so-called American Patriots disguised themselves as Indians, went aboard three British ships, and confiscated tea, property, and threw it into Boston Harbor. And the very gentlemen, the very patriots, who are denouncing Russia today because she has confiscated property, are those who glorify the confiscation of property from Great Britain during the period of the American War. The very ones who protest against the Red Guard in Russia that is defending the revolution are those who glorify the Sons of Liberty who were the Red Guard of the revolution in this country.

And so I might draw a large number of historical parallels here tonight to show you that there is a great deal of similarity, so far as methods are concerned, although, of course, the object was not the same.

The difference is this: We are accustomed in this country to glorify all bourgeois revolutions, all capitalistic revolutions are glorified, are worshipped, but any revolution that proposes to emancipate working men and peasants, are denounced and are anathematized, and they try to strangle it in the blood of those who achieve them.

However, the Russian Revolution, the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic, in all probability, is now destined to survive. All the cunning of the Allies, all the plots of counterrevolutionists, all the blockades they may seek to establish against Soviet Russia, in all probability are going to fail; and during all the coming years that are yet to come, all the generations that are yet to come upon this earth, it will be known that in Russia the red banner of freedom flows above 150 million human beings, and it will stand as a beacon light to all the peoples of the world; and because it will serve as a beacon light, for that reason the diplomats

and the bankers and the financial oligarchy and the international imperialists intend to crush it if they possibly can. Russia is an inspiration of the working class, to the working class of the world.

There is plenty of lying and there will be plenty of more lying about Russia. They tell us they have proposed a massacre of the bourgeoisie and the intellectuals of Russia, and we read in the newspapers one morning about this terrible thing, and we get visions of Lenin, for example, drinking a bowl of human blood for breakfast, of Trotsky dining on the shinbone of a Tsarist officer, of Madam Culendale gnawing on the delicate fingers of an artist or musician. And then when the hour came for this massacre of the bourgeoisie and the intellectuals, the news came through that instead of a massacre, there was a general amnesty for several thousands of political prisoners. (*Applause.*)

And they talk about the nationalization of women. Mr. [Louis] Waldman has spoken about that I understand, but assuming this nationalization is correct, assuming there was some truth in the statement that women had been nationalized in Russia, what grounds are there for complaint in the United States? Is it not a fact that in thousands and thousands of cities of the United States, ruled by Republican and Democratic Parties alike, official prostitution is recognized, is taxed, is licensed, is regulated by these Republicans and Democrats throughout the United States? Yes — and many of them even patronize them. (*Applause.*)

The things that they have charged against Russia — violence, suppression of free discussion, and so on — why, in the name of common sense, aren't these the very things that we have in the United States, that still prevail in the United States in many parts of the country? All through the Mississippi Valley and the Rocky Mountain states and the wheat-growing states of the Northwest, and the entire Gulf States, almost to this very hour, no Socialist meetings can be held. So if there be any suppression of opinions in Russia, why it ought to be in perfect accord with the Democratic Bourbons who constitute the administration of this country today. They ought to be perfectly satisfied with it, because in that case the Bolsheviks are merely following the example of the Democratic administration.

They say that newspapers are suppressed, that no anti-Bolshevik papers are allowed to appear, which is not so; but as a matter of fact, thousands of papers

opposed to the administration of the United States have been crushed, and they can not get their mailing privileges back to this hour.

They say violence is committed against the opponents of the ruling party in Russia. As a matter of fact, in the United States thousands of men have been mobbed, tarred and feathered, and in some cases lynched; and in the Southern states of the United States, where the Democratic Party has ruled absolutely supreme, with the exception of one period, since the days of Thomas Jefferson, in that part of the country the most vicious violence prevails that has ever cursed any nation in history, and black brothers of ours are burned alive at the stake — in the United States. If we be opposed to violence, let us clean our own dirty back steps, before we make any suggestions about Russia. *(Great applause.)*

So there is not a crime, there is not an atrocity, there is not an injustice that is charged against the ruling party in Russia but can be brought, to a large extent, with equal or more justice, against many of the politicians and the administration of the United States today. What they hold up to us is an image of their own rotten, dirty regime in the United States, and this particular thing, this vile thing that they have made a thing of hatred and disgust throughout the United States, they have labeled it the Bolsheviks.

When I was a boy growing up, when my parents wanted me to mind them, they always had a particular method, and the parents of other boys out in the Mississippi Valley did the same way. My father and my mother would sometimes call me before them and say, "Jimmy, don't you go to the river; don't you go to the river in swimming with those boys again — you might get drowned." And not only that: "But if you do it again, and if you don't mind me, the bogeyman will get you — now, look out!"

That bogeyman was impressed upon me as a sort of visualized form. He appeared to me as a monster human being with large bushy hair, bristling hair and whiskers, one from whose mouth there came blue fire, one who had huge talons upon his fingers — a horrible monstrosity.

And when I came into my room, and sometimes went into a dark rook, I looked from one side to the other to see if I could find the bogeyman. I was afraid of the bogeyman. They impressed it upon my mind.

It terrorized me.

Do you know, my friends, that the ruling powers of the world have profited by that sort of terrorism that is practiced upon the children of the country? They have constructed a monstrous shape, guilty of the most horrible crimes, and that is the bogeyman. They have created for the grown-up children of the world this bogeyman, and they call that man, that bogeyman, a Bolshevik. It is a creation of their own craven, cowardly mind, a creation that is an artificial creation.

As a matter of fact, if one-half of what is said against the ruling party in Russia was true there would not be any one of us saying a word in its behalf here tonight. But because we know that it is a world propaganda, that it is financed by the bankers in Lombard Street and on the Paris Bourse and in Wall Street, the International Finance Oligarchy which, through the League of Nations, proposes to dominate the world, to exploit the peoples of the world — because we know that they are back of it, we know that they are giving us an artificial bogeyman when they talk these things about the Bolsheviks. *(Applause.)*

Now, a few words and I am through. We have a big struggle before us in the United States. There is no question about it. Nowhere in the world are the dark forces of reaction and autocracy more active in these United States. The National Obscurity [Security] League, the American Defense Society, the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, the bankers, the diplomats, the professional politicians have made up their minds when Tsarism went down in Russia, by the gods they are going to introduce it into the United States!

Sometimes I think one reason why we are all supporting Kolchak in Siberia is because some of the politicians in the United States want Siberia for the same purpose as the Tsar had it for. They want it for their political prisoners, the several thousand human beings who are wearing chains in the penitentiaries of the United States today.

We have a big struggle before us. They would like to goad us into some conduct that would enable them to crush us, but we shall not play their games; we shall continue our efforts along peaceful, intelligent, educational lines, knowing that in the last analysis that once we reach the heart, the brain, the conscience of the great mass of the American people, come what will, gags, chains, jails, cannot prevent us from transform-

ing the United States into a genuine, thoroughgoing industrial democracy of Socialism. (*Great applause.*)

That may be years, but it may be only a few years. My judgment is that if Europe goes Socialist — and the bankers of the United States who return from Europe are afraid that it is going to go Socialist within the next year — if it does go Socialist, capitalism cannot permanently last in the Western Hemisphere; it has got to go Socialist also.

When it goes Socialist, when this world is free, and the proper principles dominate the institutions of the 20th Century all over the world, we can look back over the stages of history and compare this rotten, brutal, drunken capitalism with all the other periods that have gone before, and we can see this, that practically all the ancient history at least contributed something worthwhile to mankind.

The ancient Greeks gave us her lawgivers in Solon and Pericles; her great sculptors and philosophers in Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, and the rest.

The ancient Egyptian civilization gave us her wonderful pyramids, the wonderful work that is the admiration of modern engineers today.

Even India with here mystic philosophies, contributed something that has been lasting for mankind.

Even backward, feudal, superstitious Middle Ages gave us wonderful handicrafts, and their wonderful Gothic cathedrals; that even the ever present capitalism gave us some of their wonderful scientists, Huxley, Wallace, and the rest.

But in these days of capitalism, in these days when it has grown idiotical, brutal, and corrupt, what has it to offer in comparison with all the other periods of history? Nothing but censorship, jails, gags, poverty, prostitution, destitution, and corruption in general. Mankind will at least breathe free when the working class passes this thing on to history, with all the other slave regimes of the past. (*Great applause.*)

**Chairman [Charles] Solomon:** Comrades, I think so much of that speech that we are going to ask our good friend who is taking it, the stenographer in the corner, I presume for the police authorities or for the Department of Justice, to please transcribe a copy of it for us. We will be happy to pay anything within reason for a transcript of that speech. I think it was a fine speech. I think the Socialist Party will be happy to print it in the form of a pamphlet, so that we may distribute it or sell it as propaganda literature. (*Great applause.*)

The pity of it is this: That when the police officials or the Department of Justice agents read that speech, finding nothing in it that in their judgment is seditious or violative of the law, they will pass it up, unappreciative of the splendid message it contains.

If only we could be assured that the speech would have an enlightening effect upon a narrow-minded lot of blind bats who will read it, there would be some satisfaction in the whole situation beyond this meeting; but since we know that so far as we are concerned, they will look for a word here and a phrase there, upon which they may pin an indictment, why there is nothing but despair so far as they are concerned.

I do not mean that man who is taking the speech, because I am almost willing to bet it is 75 to 100 that he is in complete sympathy with this speech.

Now I want to say again, if he can't do anything else with the transcript, he can come down to our office any time and we will be happy to pay him for that transcript, because I am in earnest about it. We would like to make a pamphlet out of it, because it will make a splendid piece of socialist literature.

I think you will agree with me that it was one of the most learned and one of the most instructive and one of the most timely speeches delivered from the platform.

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*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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