
Speech at the Congress of the Peoples of the East: Baku, Azerbaijan — Sept. 4, 1920.

by John Reed

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I represent here the revolutionary workers of one of the great imperialist powers, the United States of America, which exploits and oppresses the peoples of the colonies.

You, the peoples of the East, the peoples of Asia, have not yet experienced for yourselves the rule of America. You know and hate the British, French and Italian imperialists, and probably you think that “free America” will govern better, will liberate the peoples of the colonies, will feed and defend them.

No. The workers and peasants of the Philippines, the peoples of Central America and the islands of the Caribbean, they know what it means to live under the rule of “free America.”

Take, for example, the peoples of the Philippines. In 1898 the Filipinos rebelled against the cruel colonial government of Spain, and the Americans helped them. But after the Spaniards had been driven out the Americans did not want to go away.

Then the Filipinos rose against the Americans, and this time the “liberators” started to kill them, their wives and children: they tortured them and eventually conquered them. They seized their land and forced them to work and make profits for American capitalists.

The Americans have promised the Filipinos independence. Soon an independent Filipino republic will be proclaimed. But this does not mean that the American capitalists will leave or that the Filipinos will not continue to work to make profits for them. The American capitalists have given the Filipino leaders a share of their profits — they have given them govern-



ment jobs, land and money — they have created a Filipino capitalist class which also lives on the profits created by the workers — and in whose interest it is to keep the Filipinos in slavery.

This has also happened in Cuba, which was freed from Spanish rule with the help of the Americans. It is now an independent Republic. But American millionaire trusts own all the sugar plantations, apart from some small tracts which they have let the Cuban capitalists have: the latter also administer the country. And

the moment that the workers of Cuba try to elect a government which is not in the interests of the American capitalists, the United States of America sends soldiers into Cuba to compel the people to vote for their oppressors.

Or let us take the example of the republics of Haiti and San Domingo, where the peoples won freedom a century ago. Since this island was fertile and the people living on it could be put to use by the American capitalists, the government of the US sent soldiers and sailors there on the pretext of maintaining order and smashed these two republics, setting up in their place a military dictatorship worse than the British tyrants.

Mexico is another rich country which is close to the USA. In Mexico live a backward people who were enslaved for centuries, first by the Spaniards and then by foreign capitalists. There, after many years of civil war, the people formed their own government, not a proletarian government but a democratic one, which wanted to keep the wealth of Mexico for the Mexicans and tax the foreign capitalists. The American capitalists did not concern themselves with sending bread to the hungry Mexicans. No, they initiated a counter-revolution in Mexico, in which Madero, the first revolutionary President, was killed. Then, after a three-year struggle, the revolutionary regime was restored, with Carranza as President. The American capitalists made another counterrevolution and killed Carranza, establishing once more a government friendly to themselves.

In North America itself there are ten million Negroes who possess neither political or civil rights, despite the fact that by law they are equal citizens. With the purpose of distracting the attention of the American workers from the capitalists, their exploiters, the latter stir up hatred against the Negroes, provoking war between the white and black races. The Negroes, whom they lawlessly burn alive, are beginning to see that their only hope lies in armed resistance to the white bandits.

At the present time the American capitalists are addressing friendly words to the peoples of the East, with a promise of aid and food. This applies especially to Armenia. Millions of dollars have been collected by the American millionaires in order to send bread to the starving Armenians. And many Armenians are now

looking for help to Uncle Sam.

These same American capitalists incite the American workers and farmers against each other: they starve and exploit the peoples of Cuba and the Philippines, they savagely kill and burn alive American Negroes, and in America itself American workers are obliged to work under frightful conditions, receiving low wages for a long workday. When they are exhausted they are thrown out on to the street, where they die of hunger.

The same gentleman who is now in charge of bringing aid to the starving Armenians, Mr. Cleveland Dodge who writes emotional articles about how the Turks have driven the Armenians into the desert, is the owner of big copper mines where thousands of American workers are exploited, and when these workers dared to go on strike the guards protecting Mr. Dodge's mines drove them at the point of the bayonet out into the desert — just as was done to the Armenians.

Many Armenians are grateful to America for its attitude to the Armenians who suffered from the brutality of the Turks during the war. But what has America done for the Armenians apart from issuing wordy declarations? Nothing. I was in Constantinople at that time, in 1915, and I know that the missionaries refused to make any serious protest against the atrocities, saying that they had a lot of property in Turkey and so did not want to bring pressure to bear on the Turks. The American ambassador, Mr. Strauss, himself a millionaire who exploited thousands of workers in his enterprises in America, proposed that the entire Armenian people be shipped to America, and himself donated quite a large sum for this project to be carried out; but his plan was to make the Armenians work in American factories and provide cheap labor so as to increase the profits of Mr. Strauss and his friends.

But why do the American capitalists promise aid and food to Armenia? Is it out of pure philanthropy? If so, let them feed the peoples of Central America and help the Negroes of America itself.

No. The main reason is that there is mineral wealth in Armenia, and that it is a big reservoir of cheap labor which can be exploited by American capitalists.

The American capitalists want to win the confidence of the Armenians with a view to getting their

claws into Armenia and enslaving the Armenian nation. It is with this aim that American missionaries have established schools in the Near East.

But there is also another very important reason: the American capitalists, together with the other capitalist nations, united in the League of Nations, are afraid that the workers and peasants of Armenia will follow the example of Soviet Russia and Soviet Azerbaijan, will take power and their country's resources into their own hands, and will work for themselves, making a united front with the workers and peasants of the whole world against world imperialism. The American capitalists are afraid of a revolution in the East.

Promising food to starving peoples and at the same time organizing a blockade of the Soviet Republics — that is the policy of the United States. The blockade of Soviet Russia has starved to death thousands of Russian women and children. This same method of blockade was applied in order to turn the Hungarian people against their Soviet Government. The same tactic is now being used in order to draw the people of White Hungary into war against Soviet Russia. This method is also being used in the small countries bordering on Russia — Finland, Estonia, Latvia. But now all these small countries have been obliged to make peace with Soviet Russia: they are bankrupt and starving. Now the American Government no longer offers them food; they are no longer of any use to America, and so their peoples can starve.

The American capitalists promise bread to Armenia. This is an old trick. They promise bread but they never give it. Did Hungary get bread after the fall of the Soviet Government? No. The Hungarian people are still starving today. Did the Baltic countries get

bread? No. At a time when the starving Estonians had nothing but potatoes, the American capitalists sent them ships laden with rotten potatoes which could not be sold at a profit in America. No, comrades, Uncle Sam is not one ever to give anybody something for nothing. He comes along with a sack stuffed with straw in one hand and a whip in the other. Whoever takes Uncle Sam's promises at their face value will find himself obliged to pay for them with blood and sweat. The American workers are demanding an ever larger share of the product of their labor; with a view to preventing revolution at home, the American capitalists are forced to seek out colonial peoples to exploit, peoples who will furnish sufficient profit to keep the American workers in obedience and so make them participants in the exploitation of the Armenians. I represent thousands of revolutionary American workers who know this, and who understand that, acting together with the Armenian workers and peasants, with the toiling masses of the whole world, they will overthrow capitalism. World capitalism will be destroyed, and all the peoples will be free. We appreciate the need for solidarity between all the oppressed and toiling peoples, for unity of the revolutionary workers of all the countries of Europe and America under the leadership of the Russian Bolsheviks, in the Communist International. And we say to you, peoples of the East: Do not believe the promises of the American capitalists!

There is only one road to freedom. Unite with the Russian workers and peasants who have overthrown their capitalists and whose Red Army has beaten the foreign imperialists! Follow the red star of the Communist International!

Translated by Brian Pearce.

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