
Deportation — Where?

by John Reed

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The most modern and most fashionable method employed by tyrants to get rid of their rebellious subjects is to “deport” them.

This new weapon of autocracy was invented by the Turkish government in 1915, when the whole Armenian nation was removed from its ancient home and driven into the deserts of Asia Minor to starve or be butchered by bandits. Kaiser Wilhelm employed the same tactics in Belgium in 1916-17, when the Belgian working class was deported en masse to work for its conquerors in Germany.

The American capitalist class immediately saw the advantages of deportation as a means to make war upon American workers. In the summer of 1917, the Phelps-Dodge Corporation, operating mines in Arizona, was faced by a strike. In Bisbee, and several other towns, the officials and retainers of the Phelps-Dodge Corporation, together with the businessmen of the place, armed themselves with rifles, rounded up the strikers and their friends, commandeered a railroad train, and deported 1,200 men into the desert.

This action proved a great success. Of course, there was no warrant of law in thus picking up innocent men and shipping them out of town without a trial, nor was it in accordance with the statutes to hold up American citizens at the point of a gun, tear them away from their families, and exile them. But the law of the capitalist class acquiesced. The indictments formally brought against the Phelps-Dodge officials and their accomplices were dismissed in the Federal courts.

Since then deportation, lawless or lawful, has risen rapidly in public esteem. Recently the newspapers told of the deportation of several hundred Negroes from Coatesville, Pa. These Negroes had been lured from their homes in the south to help win the war for democracy by doing war-work in the factories of the North. The war is over now, and democracy is assured — in Germany, anyway. There is no more work for the Negroes in Coatesville — and, besides, they insist upon

living wages — and, moreover, the South needs her slave-labor back again. What to do? The question was solved very simply in Coatesville. The Negroes were simply driven to the southern limits of the town by armed men and told to “go home.”

Deportation is now the recognized means for dealing with class-conscious workers of foreign birth.

The immigration law provides for the deportation of foreigners in this country who “advocate the overthrow of the government by force.” Naturally, therefore, when a foreign worker participates in a strike, or is found endeavoring to organize the workers, he is discovered to be “affiliated with an organization which stands for the overthrow of the government by force” — and he is promptly deported.

A few weeks ago we were startled by the arrival in New York of a train-load of such “anarchists,” whom the newspapers announced were picked up along the Pacific Coast, several of them in the ranks of the Seattle strikers, and, after a hasty hearing, bundled off to New York under guard, “the courts cooperating.” At the moment there are also several hundred Socialists, IWW, and other “malcontents” held in prison at Ellis Island, awaiting deportation to the lands of their birth. And all over the country others are being quickly arrested.

Among these are many political refugees from their own countries, whose return there means long prison sentences, and probably worse. There are also many Russians.

It is now fairly well known that there is a war in Russia — a war between the remnants of the Russian properties classes, supported by foreign bayonets, and the Russian people, rallied around the Soviet government. The vast majority of the Russians whom the United States government is now attempting to deport are Bolsheviki. If they are deported to any party of Russia, except Soviet Russia, they are doomed to certain death, either at the hands of their own master-class, the Finnish White Guards, or the Allied troops, whose record of brutalities in the parts of Russia which they occupy is scarcely surpassed by the record of the Germans in Belgium.

Where is the American government going to send the Russian workers? To questions addressed to the United States Department of Labor no answer is returned to this vital question. We do not believe that American labor is going to allow our Russian Comrades to be murdered in this way.

We happen to know that the Scandinavian countries have closed their frontiers to Russia. And, even were the borders of Sweden open,

it would be impossible for a Soviet sympathizer to pass through White Finland. The Allies and the Russian renegades hold all ports of entry to Russia — the Black Sea ports, Archangel, Vladivostok, and Harbin. There is only one way by which the deportees can be safely sent to Russia — and that is via the Baltic Sea, direct to some port held by Soviet Russia.

For a year and a half, tens of thousands of Russian workers in this country have clamored for permission to go home. They have not been allowed to go... By what right does the American government refuse these Russian citizens the right to return to Free Russia? Thousands, tens of thousands, want to be deported — if they are deported to Soviet Russia, and not into the hands of their enemies. President Roosevelt, in 1910, deported Mexican revolutionists across the Rio Grande, where they were captured and shot by the butchers of Porfirio Diaz. Let us not permit the Russian Comrades to be delivered over to the tender mercies of Kolchak, Semenov, Chaikovsky, Denikin, and the Czecho-Slovaks.

If the United States government will open our frontiers to those foreigners who want to leave this monstrous industrial tyranny of ours, where the laws are seemingly made to be obeyed by workingmen only, the “alien agitators” will go home, and there will be such a rush for the seaports that there won't be enough ships to carry them.

Do Secretary of Labor [William B.] Wilson and the Department of Justice imagine that with the revolutionists they are deporting the revolution? If so, they are mistaken. The revolution is not a person, or a thousand persons; it is an idea, and ideas cannot be deported.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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