
Speech in Celebration of the 2nd Anniversary of the Russian Revolution: Hunts Point Place, New York City — Nov. 7, 1919. [excerpt]

by Benjamin Gitlow

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Comrades:

The newspapers report to us that just now Petrograd is not captured (*laughter*), and they also report that the wonderful General Iudenich, who was supposed to be in Petrograd killing Bolsheviks, has a Bolshevik army in back of him, a Bolshevik army in front of him, and Bolsheviks all around. Now, we pick up this morning's paper and we find that the wonderful, stable government of Admiral Kolchak, that is famous for its good brand of alcohol (*laughter*), has decided that the city of Moscow is a little too shaky and they must move somewhere else. (*Laughter.*) And so Kolchak, with his heavy boots and iron spurs, is on the run; General Iudenich has no place to run to (*laughter*), and Denikin is worrying what is going to happen to him tomorrow. And the Bolsheviks are still in power; the workers' government of Russia is now 2 years old (*applause*), and the capitalist governments and the capitalist class the world over, trembling and frightened, has got to look on.

Two years ago today the Bolsheviks went into power in Russia, in 1917; and today in Russia the Bolsheviks are no longer in power, but the working class the world over is today in power in Russia (*applause*), and the capitalist class and the government of this country that represents it so well knows very well that the working class is in power in Russia, and one of the gentlemen of the American government reported to the Senate Committee that was investigating Russian affairs [Overman Committee] that the United States as such could not open business relations with

Russia because Russia had hundreds of pounds of gold, and that this gold would be at the disposal of the wild-eyed, long-haired Bolsheviks right in America. (*Laughter.*) And once these Bolsheviks got a hold of Russian gold, God knows what will happen to Morgan & Co. and to the capitalist class of this country. (*Applause.*) And it is the same way with England, and it is the same story with France, and it is the same story with Italy. They know that the workers' government of Russia is not a national government representing Russia alone, but that it is the government of the entire working class and that it is challenging today the entire world order of capitalism. (*Applause.*)

Today, or last night, one of the agents of the United States government, and particularly the government of the city of New York, swooped down upon a small individual and arrested him because he gave out circulars announcing that this meeting would take place. We read in the newspapers that in Chicago, for example, the authorities there have issued orders to the anti-anarchist squad and to the bomb squad and to all the different squads that they have at their command that there shall be no celebrations in Chicago in honor of the 2nd Anniversary of the Soviet Republic of Russia; and only tonight, if you would go to 116th Street and Madison Avenue, you would see the sidewalks lined with police, each with a heavy, long club in his hand, looking at people trying to get into the hall, and also find the hall dark. They have decided it was dangerous to public safety to permit Laurel Garden to have within its four walls a meeting to celebrate the 2nd Anniversary of Soviet Russia. But the fact is

that despite all persecution, despite all threats, despite all arrests, despite the organized power of the capitalist class, November 7, 1919, is going to be one of the most memorable days in the history of the working class the world over (*applause*), not only in this country but in England, Ireland, France, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, and even we get rumors of trouble in Japan.

The working class of all nations, of all creeds, of all colors, are banded as one in support of a government that is theirs (*applause*), and the capitalist diplomats — one of them happened to take stock recently (*laughter*) — who were in Paris a few months ago (*laughter*), tried very hard to solve the Russian question. You had the brains of the capitalist world, sitting around the green table, I suppose, and worrying their heads off what is to be done with such a picayune little country of 180 millions of people like Soviet Russia (*laughter*), and they thought and thought and thought, and I believe some of their heads grew while they were thinking. (*Laughter.*) And they made one proposition and then put the proposition aside. First they claimed that it would be advantageous to invite the Bolsheviks to Paris, and then Mr. Clemenceau jumps up from his chair and said, “Why, if we have Mr. Lenin or Trotsky in Paris, we will have the Bolsheviks in control in France.” (*Laughter and applause.*) Well, Lloyd George did not want them in London (*laughter*); and Wilson did not want them in Washington (*laughter*); and Orlando didn’t want them in Rome. Then they thought they would take a small island away from civilization and bring them there. (*Laughter.*) And they abandoned that proposition, I believe, because they thought the Bolsheviks might meet some English, Italian, French, or American sailors and turn their heads. (*Laughter.*)

So from all their propositions they decided, after all, that it wasn’t a question of making peace; that it wasn’t a question of doing business; that it was a question of maintaining the power and the rule of the capitalist class the world over. So they supported armies, so they hired brigands; they kept their factories busy making guns and ammunition to send to counterrevolutionaries for the purpose of shooting Russian working men; and they decided to surround the 180 millions of people, so that they might through bloodshed, through brutality, through murder, and through starvation, force the Russian working class to accept the

rule of the capitalist the world over. They tried it for a hell of a long time and failed. (*Laughter.*)

But then something happened in other parts of the world. And it happened equally as well in the United States. And it happened in a very unimportant town on the Pacific Coast. The capitalist class of the United States discovered that the longshoremen of Seattle (*applause*) realized that the cause of the Russian workers was their cause, and they refused to load a ship with food, ammunition, and guns for Kolchak. (*Great applause.*) And the French workers and the Italian workers and the British workers and the Irish workers had on different occasions given the same lesson to their capitalist class. The working class, if it wants to liberate itself, the working class, if it wants to get hold of real freedom, must recognize that the struggle of the Russian workers is their struggle. (*Applause.*)

And the workers the world over, despite the lies of their capitalist papers, despite the false promises of their crooked politicians, despite the sermons of their ministers, despite the wisdom of their college professors, must determine to follow the example of the Russian workers and do everything in their power to stop intervention in Russia. (*Applause.*) So the workers must determine that they will ship not a single bit of clothing, not one bullet, not one rifle; that they will have absolutely nothing to do with the bloody business of killing their fellow workers abroad. And we are celebrating here tonight, we are celebrating in what is supposed to be a free and glorious country! Some of you might look for the freedom, but you won’t find it. (*Laughter.*) While we are sitting here tonight, 2,000 of the noblest men of the working class of this country are behind prison bars. While we are sitting here tonight, scores of them have died in jail, scores of them have gone insane, and scores of them, hundreds of them, have been so brutally treated that the Spanish inquisition is a joke in comparison. And at the same time one of the noblest spirits in the American labor movement [Gene Debs] lies sick in a federal penitentiary, and he is expected to die almost daily, because he had the courage to state that the bloody war that was fought by capitalist nations was a war for the capitalist class and had no benefits for the working class. (*Applause.*)

We of the working class in America must realize that there is only one way in which we can force the

jail doors open; that we must organize our strings of workers; that we must continue to gain power and more power; that we must be strong enough to declare to our capitalist class and the government that faithfully serves the capitalist class that unless the jail doors are opened, we will use our power to cripple the economic basis upon which this government rests. (*Great applause.*)

And we who celebrate the Russian revolution, we who glorify in the fact that the workers' government has defied capitalism for 2 years, recall not with regret, but with deep sympathy, that which the working class has gone through in the past few years. While we are celebrating the success of Soviet Russia, let us not forget the courageous attempt of the Hungarian working class to defy capitalism. (*Applause.*) Small in numbers, surrounded by the hounds of brutality, they existed for a short period and gloriously went down to ruin because the working class of other countries was not ready to support them.

You know the story of Hungary. You know how the blood flowed like rivulets through the gutters in the streets of Budapest. You know that every member of the Red Army of Hungary who was found was shot immediately. You know the vicious orgy for life, for slaughter, that followed the incoming again into Hungary of the capitalist class. In our celebration let us not forget the spirit and the courage that dominated the

living expressions of our movement, that of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. (*Applause.*)

The working class, exploited in industry, denied the opportunity of life, poor, downtrodden, uneducated, when it determines to rule, to be independent and to be free, always faces the murderous brutality of the capitalist class. The working class, unless misled by capitalists, never commits murder, but the capitalist class and the capitalist government are built up on bayonets, built up on murder, built up on starvation, built up on exploitation. (*Applause.*)

And so we don't care what the capitalist class of America thinks; their newspapers can continue to call the workers, whenever they strike for more money, Bolsheviks. Pretty soon the workers will begin to believe it. (*Laughter.*) We don't care what the courts and the police and the military butchers of the capitalist class of this country think. We're determined to carry on our work. We are determined to go forward. We are determined to organize the working class. We are determined that as far as the United States is concerned we are going to work night and day, day in and day out, week in and week out, year in and year out, until we abolish this class government and the workers shall be free.

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