
John Reed is Dead

by Robert Minor

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Moscow (Via Christiana and London) Oct. 22.— The body of John Reed lies all this week in state in the Labor Temple of Moscow with a guard of honor of 14 soldiers of the Red Army. October 24, it will be buried in the most hallowed spot in all Russia, by the north wall of the Kremlin, with a great funeral demonstration. The Soviet Government has arranged a funeral holiday so that all the workers of Moscow may attend.

The Tsar Nicholas once complained that he was unable to have the best of Russian music because, unfortunately, the best composers were guilty of the crime of sedition and he could not encourage them.

Today the Tsar Nicholas lies in a hole in the ground of a Siberian village, and the sweetest music of Russia is played in his palace to the ears of the plain workingmen for whom the composers really wrote their music anyway.

In Moscow there died the other day a great American literary artist, John Reed. He was a young man, only 33, and already known about the earth and one of the finest American artists.

John Reed began his career 10 years ago as a reporter for the *New York World* and for the *New York Tribune*. He did well. Very soon he graduated from the ranks of daily reporters and was acknowledged

as one of the most brilliant writers on the high-priced magazines that spend their thousands to get the best of writing.

And what is the reward of such success? A Riverside Drive apartment, a country estate, an automobile — the right to associate with the sort of people that live that sort of life. The people that live in those ways are stupid. They are drunk most of the time. They never know what to say, and they like to have a John Reed around to say the things they can't themselves think of. They buy expensive clothes for themselves and their women whom they have also bought; and they eat and they drink and they have headaches and they quarrel with their women-cattle, and the women quarrel with their men cattle-herders — and then they don't know what to do next. So they go out and get young writers, artists that are fresh and strong and young, and they bring these in and eat with them and drink with them, and get the young artists to talk for them.

And the young artists are supposed to be grateful for the company of the expensively dressed persons and for the dinners and the automobiles and the "social position." If the young artists are grateful,



they become more and more like the people that surround them, and slowly they lose their art. They sink into the position of clowns for the besotted aristocracy, in private life, and they become writers of excited drivel for the magazines and the book market, drivel without real connection with life — drivel that flatters their surroundings and lures the jaded clerks and the middle class to strive to succeed in business and thereby gain a place in the automobile-cocktail-Riverside Drive drunken swirl of the stupid propertied class.

The artist grows old, becomes a bourgeois, stodgy and dreamless, depends upon his cocktail, and he quarrels with his wife about silk dresses that no artist's mind should ever bother about.

That is the way that most American artists have gone in the past; that is success as the bourgeois world offers it; that is the way they can win approval of Tsars of Russia and Tsars of Fifth Avenue.

John Reed looked with young eyes upon the success that was offered him. He saw that it was not real. He saw that the silk was really rags and the wearers fools. He didn't listen to their stupid talk, but listened to workers in mines and factories and IWW halls and around campfires, and he heard them say that the day was coming when the palaces would be emptied of fools and drunkards and that they, the workers, would live there. And John Reed liked that. It furnished him with a new dream. It made his young blood jump again, it kept him an artist. John Reed became a revolutionist. He sang his song louder than ever, and sang it for the revolution.

He went to Mexico to find the revolution.

He went to Russia and did find it. And what he wrote back from Russia made the thousands of hearts of his fellow-workers in America beat faster. It made them look at the palaces here in America in a different way, and it made them look upon the besotted American aristocracy as a conquerable class. Then Reed came back to America and here gave his mind and strength to organizing workers in America for what the workers proved could be done in Russia.

The propertied classes in America shook with rage at John Reed. In every city is a committee of businessmen called a Grand Jury, which has the function of picking out all persons who endanger the private ownership of the palaces and automobiles and country estates. Two of these Grand Juries — one in New York and one in Chicago — picked out John Reed as a criminal, indicted him, and demanded that his voice be smothered in jail.

Reed eluded them and went back to Russia, went like a workman so often goes, stowed away in the coal-hole of a ship — for America would not give a passport to its great writer now.....

So the great American died, and the wealthy class is glad that he is dead. Like the Tsar Nicholas they could not sanction Reed's art any more, after he spoke for the workers; and he died under their indictment as a criminal.

It all goes to show that the artists are ours, the artists belong to the workers, and to be artists at all they must dream — dream of things that frighten Tsars and Grand Juries — dream of workmen in palaces. Art Belongs to the Revolution.

John Reed belonged to the workers.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Photo of John Reed distributed by UCP in 1920, courtesy Judith Allison Walters.

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