

CONTENTS

Chapter X		
Moscow		273
Chapter XI		
The Conquest of Power		288
Chapter XII		
The Peasants' Congress		319
APPENDICES		
<i>Appendix 1</i>		
Introduction by Lenin, 1919		341
<i>Appendix 2</i>		
Introduction by N. Krupskaya, 1923		342
<i>Appendix 3</i>		
John Reed's Appendices		344
<i>Appendix 4</i>		
Letter from Louise Bryant to Max Eastman		449
<i>Appendix 5</i>		
The Biography of John Reed by Albert Rhys Williams		454

P. SAINATH
INTRODUCTION

"If Mark Twain or John Reed were alive today and looking for work, would they find it at your newspaper or channel? Could Twain have a column? Would you carry Reed's dispatches?"

That was a question I put to several American editors and journalists in 2000. I was touring the USA as an Eisenhower Fellow and meeting, often interviewing, many media personalities there. My focus was on mavericks, anti-establishment, progressive and radical journalists, including Studs Terkel, Gore Vidal, Alexander Cockburn and Adam Hochschild. However, I did meet some very mainstream ones, including Walter Cronkite, well past 80, but quite alive and articulate. Also, Joe Lelyveld of the *New York Times*. I usually asked these questions at the end of those very different meetings.

Cockburn spilt his coffee laughing out loud at the idea of a Twain or Reed finding a place on staff in the contemporary corporate media. Terkel, though unwell, stood up and enacted a scene he'd been through in the McCarthy period, when he was blacklisted and hounded out of ABC television. Next, he was harassed at CBS Radio—to sign a "loyalty oath." "I gotta act this out. Watch me," he said. "I'm a great ham." And, in the middle of a Chicago café, performed the scene of his confrontation with "CBS suits"—which saw some oaths exchanged, though not of loyalty. The great Gospel singer Mahalia Jackson was present, he said, "and stuck her neck out and saved mine." Vidal (another "blacklister" of the time) joked he probably wouldn't find a job with them himself—in 2000. Cronkite said he thought Twain might get a column or show but would lose it very quickly—mainly because "Samuel Langhorne Clemens's contempt for the bosses of our time would surface quickly and hilariously." Clemens was Twain's real name. Of Reed,

Cronkite said, pausing a few seconds, that after six decades “in our profession, I’d think you’d have to give that perspective a place.”

Lelyveld pondered a moment and said upfront, “Twain probably would not find a column here . . . or in most mainstream publications . . . We do have a Bob Herbert, but . . .” It seemed to me he felt Twain’s scathing irreverence would not easily find a place in any major paper. My question on Reed either did not register, or he did not find the author of *Ten Days That Shook the World* worthy of consideration at all. Since it was one posed as I was stepping out of his office, we couldn’t pursue it.

This was late September 2000, less than a year away from 9/11. Not long after which the *New York Times*, which would have dismissed the credentials of John Reed, enthusiastically published Judith Miller’s many Words of Mass Deception on mythical Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq. Miller would later be “embedded” with a US military unit in that country. She would be forced to resign from *The Times* in 2005, but her job as an embedded hack was done.

John Reed was embedded in the reality of the Russian Revolution—and before that the peasant uprising in Mexico. He was not cocooned with military or mercenary protection. In the chaos of the revolutionary uprising of 1917, he came close to being shot or otherwise killed by people on different sides of the battle. But, though exuberant, he did not mythologise or romanticise himself. And never lost his sense of humour. His account of the first hotel he went to in Moscow after November 7, “we entered an office lit by two candles.” Reed and his companions were welcomed in this hotel office. “Yes, we have some very comfortable rooms,” they were told, “but all the windows are shot out. If the *gospodin* does not mind a *little fresh air*.” It is important to remember that the *gospodin*, the Russian word for “mister,” would have to suffer below freezing temperatures in his room. Reed was not going to live the high-life as a reporter. He would stay in a room that opened out to the Moscow air, and would eat whatever he could find.

We dined at a vegetarian restaurant with the enticing name, “I Eat Nobody,” and Tolstoy’s picture prominent on the walls, and then sallied out into the streets.

John Reed was a reporter and journalist. Not a stenographer to the powerful. Nor embedded with the oppressors of those he was covering. That, of course, did not go down too well with Big Media even in his time.

For Charles Russell, who reviewed the book for the *New York Times* (April 27, 1919), Reed’s message boiled down to:

To revolt for the sake of revolting, to fight for the joy of fighting, to slay valiantly, to ride furiously, to shout vehemently are activities glorious. This we can easily perceive from Mr. Reed’s book, as from the others. But as to why we should revolt, fight, slay, ride, and shout we are left darkling.

So it was nice to see the *New York Times* acknowledge him in its Red Century Series this year. That includes a thoughtful and reflective piece by London-based journalist-author Jack Shenker. There is also a piece in that series on the “10 days still shaking the world” by—no kidding—Condoleezza Rice (October 17, 2017). It was Rice, as then U.S. Secretary of State and a great supporter of the WMD fabrications, who in 2002 wrote a major piece in—you guessed it—the *New York Times*, on “Why We Know Iraq Is Lying.” Before she joined the administration of George W. Bush, Rice was a Soviet specialist at Stanford University. Despite the title ripping off on his own, Reed gets just a few words in her Red Century piece. But they’re interesting words:

Ten Days That Shook the World captures the excitement of that moment. The author, John Reed, was an American who made no secret of his Bolshevik sympathies. He nevertheless provided a

riveting and vivid—if not impartial—account of the most pivotal phase of the revolution, as viewed from the ground.

From his vantage point, Reed could only tell a part of the story, however.

No single report or book can ever tell more than a part of the story of something so large as the Russian Revolution of 1917. Yet, as A.J.P. Taylor (probably the most popular British historian of the twentieth century) wrote in *his* preface (Penguin 1977) to *Ten Days That Shook the World*,

Reed's book is not only the best account of the Bolshevik Revolution, it comes near to being the best account of any revolution.

Reed the journalist himself made no claim to being impartial.

In the struggle, my sympathies were not neutral. But in telling the story of those great days I have tried to see events with the eye of a conscientious reporter, interested in setting down the truth.

The authenticity of his writing on the revolution gained from its being a first-hand, eyewitness account. Seen from the streets and barricades, drawn from the meeting halls and fiery debates. Acute powers of observation, aligned always with a sensitivity towards ordinary people. Not “experts.” Quite unlike the eager-to-be-embedded hacks who would decades later go all the way to Afghanistan and Iraq and work from briefings of the U.S. military units that had them on a leash—only to produce stories that could have been written just as easily in Washington D.C. Some of them probably were. Reed always sought to escape censorship from governments. Very unlike the steno-serfs of our time who would each day meekly submit their copy to their military for approval. (It sort of gave the word “copy” a new meaning.)

Reed's writing skills lent excitement and urgency to his account. Painting vivid pictures in words, he captured a moment, many moments, in time.

Describing Petrograd “on the eve,”

Up in the Nevsky in the sour twilight, crowds were battling for the latest papers, and knots of people were trying to make out the multitudes of appeals and the proclamations posted in every flat place. . . . An armoured automobile went slowly up and down, siren screaming. On every corner, in every open space, thick groups were clustered; arguing soldiers and students. Night came swiftly down, the wide-spaced streetlights flickered on, the tides of people flowed endlessly. . . . It is always like that in Petrograd just before trouble.

Inside the Smolny, where the revolution set up its offices,

. . . the long, gloomy halls and bleak rooms seemed deserted. No one moved in all the enormous pile. A deep, uneasy sound came to my ears, and looking around, I noticed that everywhere on the floor, along the walls, men were sleeping. Rough, dirty men, workers and soldiers, spattered and caked with mud, sprawled alone, or in heaps, in the careless attitudes of death. Some wore ragged bandages marked with blood. Guns and cartridge belts were scattered about. . . .

In the upstairs buffet so thick they lay that one could hardly walk. The air was foul. Through the clouded windows, a pale light streamed. A battered samovar, cold, stood on the counter, and many glasses holding dregs of tea. . . .

Reed came from a privileged background. He was—like Walter Lippmann—a Harvard graduate. He was—unlike Lippmann—never a war propagandist for his government. Reed, when covering Pancho Villa's revolt, wrote of Mexicans without that racial disdain that so much of U.S. journalism still reeks of. In *Ten Days That*

Shook the World and elsewhere, he wrote of Russians, Americans, Europeans and others without a trace of prejudice. He was dealing with human beings.

Lippmann knew Reed. And had once even praised his coverage of the Colorado Coalfield War as “undoubtedly the finest reporting that’s ever been done.” In the years that followed, Reed stayed on the Left. Lippmann became a pillar of the establishment, churning out reams of U.S. war propaganda. He would even peddle his own, to push his government towards interning fellow citizens in prison camps on U.S. soil during World War II. Well over two-thirds of the 120,000 Japanese Americans who were thrown into these camps were US citizens, born in that country. Orphans were not spared, nor even Japanese children adopted by white American parents. None of those interned was charged with a crime. They were incarcerated anyway.

In a dreadful piece, “The Fifth Column On The Coast” (February 12, 1942), Lippmann targeted Japanese Americans. He warned of the “imminent danger of a combined attack from within and from without.” He did concede that “there has been no important act of sabotage on the Pacific coast.” For him, that only proved “that the blow is well organised and that it is held back until it can be struck with maximum effect.” Veteran journalist Richard Reeves believes Lippmann’s piece pushed President Roosevelt into giving California authorities the go-ahead for the prison camps. Reeves is the author of the heart-rending book *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese-American Internment in World War II*.

Years later, Lippmann was to look back on the propaganda of the war: “It seemed impossible to wage the war energetically except by inciting the people to paroxysms of hatred and to utopian dreams.” He did not, though, mention the tragic event. Lippmann is celebrated as the father of modern journalistic objectivity. Harvard’s key journalism institution, the Nieman Foundation, is housed in a building named after him. Of fellow-Harvardian Reed, Lippmann once wrote, “By temperament, he is not a professional

writer or reporter. He is a person who enjoys himself” (*The New Republic*, December 26, 1914). In today’s Big Media jargon, Reed would be labelled an “activist,” not a journalist.

There was also this difference between Reed and so many of the “star journalists” of today. He did not return from exotic locales with “war stories” of which he was himself the focus. No “Christiane Amanpour in Baghdad” nor “Anderson Cooper on Syria’s border”—where the war in those countries is less important than the mere presence of these television icons on their soil, however briefly. CNN’s own promos leave you in no doubt as to who makes the story—and it’s not the natives, not even the friendly ones. *Ten Days That Shook the World* was not promoted as “John Reed from Red Square.” There was a revolution in Russia. He covered it. He was not invisible in his reporting but was clear that he wasn’t the story. And he was consistent: the principles he stood for in Mexico and in Russia were also those he practised at home. Within the United States, he covered—and participated in—the struggles of workers, miners, and other poor people.

As the historian Howard Zinn put it of Reed:

He rushed into the centre of wars and revolutions, strikes and demonstrations, with the eye of a movie camera, before there was one, and the memory of a tape recorder, before that existed. He made history come alive for the readers of popular magazines and impoverished radical monthlies.

Reed was moved by the silk weavers’ and workers’ strike in Paterson, New Jersey. And was arrested in 1913 while trying to speak for the strikers (the first of many times he would be arrested in his lifetime). Deeply moved by the brutal crackdown on the workers, he went on to stage a pageant recreating scenes from those battles—in New York’s old Madison Square Garden. As many as 1,200 strikers were reported to have participated in the pageant. Many thousands more came to watch the spectacle. Reed probably

hoped the pageant would also work as a benefit performance for and by the strikers.

In Colorado, he covered the miners' strike of 1913-14 which the Rockefellers and other mining interests of the day moved to crush with great barbarism. Reed arrived there a few days after the infamous Ludlow massacre which saw the Colorado National Guard attack a settlement of over a thousand workers. The workers fought back.

Estimates of the number of deaths vary but are all saddening. In all, perhaps, over two dozen people died at Ludlow, several in firing—the Guard used machine guns—and also 11 children and 2 women who suffocated to death in the miners' camp, owing to fires the Guard had set to burn the tents. More lives were lost in the days that followed, in Guard action and in rioting. Still more were slain in the other battles of the "Colorado Coalfield War." Overall, from differing estimates, it would seem the total ran to over a hundred deaths in the "war."

In Reed's powerful prose:

In three hours every striker for 50 miles in either direction knows that the militia and mine guards had burned women and children to death. Monday night they started, with all the guns they could lay their hands on, for the scene of the action at Ludlow. All night long the roads were filled with ragged mobs of armed men pouring towards the Black Hills. And not only strikers went. In Aguilar, Walsenburg and Trinidad, clerks, cab drivers, chauffeurs, school teachers, and even bankers seized their guns and started for the front. It was as if the fire started at Ludlow had set the whole country aflame.

Contrast that with the *New York Times* calling for the use of force in the Colorado War:

With the deadliest weapons of civilization in the hands of savage-

mined men, there can be no telling to what lengths the war in Colorado will go unless it is quelled by force . . . The President should turn his attention from Mexico long enough to take stern measures in Colorado.

John Reed didn't just speak "truth to power"—he spoke the truth about power. Relentlessly, passionately, powerfully.

Reed was fiercely independent, truthful, but did not pretend to be neutral—a distinction completely lost with the onset of corporate-driven journalism.

Reed set out in his early days viewing himself as a poet—but his poetry was not distinguished. It was certainly not his strong point. However, some of his prose borders on and melds with the poetic. And that comes out best in his first book *Insurgent Mexico*. A spellbinding account of the uprising of the poor and the destitute led by Pancho Villa, one of the great figures of the Mexican revolution. But that's another book, another story. It still seems worthwhile to repeat the lines about Reed by Alfredo Varela in the preface to the Argentinian edition of *Insurgent Mexico*:

In the end he is a mural painter. The great fresco is his speciality, the panoramic picture which reveals history in a thousand details.

By the time John Reed reached Russia, he had seen and developed his own understanding of class war. If *Insurgent Mexico* was near poetry, *Ten Days That Shook the World* is pulsating prose. It also takes the reporting of the marginalised to yet another, incredible level. Reed works in documents, declarations and debates a great deal more than in his earlier writings, yet the excitement never flags. And he sets the record straight on many things, including "the loot of the Winter Palace."

Reed saw ordinary people becoming "self-appointed sentinels" to protect the treasures of the Palace. And where the poor themselves were ransacking anything,

TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD

The paintings, statues, tapestries and rugs of the great state apartments were unharmed. . . . The most highly-prized loot was clothing which the working people needed. In a room where furniture was stored, we came upon two soldiers ripping the elaborate Spanish leather upholstery from chairs. They explained it was to make boots with. . . .

Indeed, some precious stuff was also stolen. He cites the Bolsheviks then and later repeatedly appealing for the return of the "inalienable property of the Russian people," of the "valuable objects of art that were stolen." The new Soviet government created "a special commission comprised of artists and archaeologists to recover the stolen objects." Even more appeals were made.

About half the loot was recovered, some of it in the baggage of foreigners leaving Russia.

Reed was to return to the United States where, of course, he was indicted for sedition. The trials of Reed and his editor Max Eastman ended with hung juries. Reed had already returned to Russia where he died of typhus in 1920.

His wife Louise Bryant wrote to his editor Max Eastman while Reed's illness raged. She wanted him to take plenty of rest before he returned to the United States where she feared he would be imprisoned.

Early in his sickness I asked him to promise me that he would rest before going home, since it only meant going to prison. I felt prison would be too much for him. I remember he looked at me in a strange way and said, "My dear Little Honey, I would do anything I could for you but don't ask me to be a coward."

Ten Days That Shook the World did more than give its fans a good read. It raised questions, it carved out a kind of journalism that would allow the marginalised in society to be heard in their

INTRODUCTION

own voice. It inspired readers, rebels, revolutionaries. As Howard Zinn would write of him:

John Reed could not be forgiven by the Establishment for refusing to separate art and insurgency, for being not only rebellious in his prose but imaginative in his activism. Protest joined to imagination was dangerous, courage combined with wit was no joke. Grim rebels can be jailed, but the highest treason, for which there is no adequate punishment, is to make rebellion attractive.

REFERENCES

- Bryant, Louise. 1918. *Six Red Months in Russia*. George H. Doran.
Newsinger, J., ed. 1999. *Shaking the World: John Reed's Revolutionary Journalism*. Bookmarks.
Reed, John. 1914. *Insurgent Mexico*. D. Appleton and Co.
Russell, Charles E. 1919. Bolshevism, in Theory and Practice, As Friend and Opponent See It. *New York Times*, 27 April.
Zinn, Howard. 1980. *A People's History of the United States*. Harper & Row.