

'Red Bells' of John Reed



The author of the article tells about the American reporter John Reed who witnessed the events of the October socialist revolution in Petrograd in 1917.

Americans, 'Red bells', Petrograd, John Reed, a reporter.

Have you ever occurred to you how many Americans have left their traces in the history of Russia? John Paul Jones (a diplomat, founder of the American Navy and admiral of the Russian Navy), Theodor Dreiser (a writer), Paul Robeson (a singer, human rights fighter), Rockwell Kent (painter), Van Cliburn (a pianist)...

It was in 1982, when I quite unexpectedly became a witness of a very interesting event on Nevsky prospect in Leningrad. A prominent Russian producer and cinema actor Sergei Bondarchuk was shooting a film 'Red Bells' about an outstanding American writer John Reed, who witnessed the Great October Socialist Revolution in Petrograd in 1917.

The script of the film was based on two books by John Reed - 'Insurgent Mexico' (1914) and 'Ten Days That Shook The World' (1919). You may ask: what was John Reed? For younger generation the name of this person may be less known, but for many representatives of the older generation both in our country and abroad the name of this man is well known and recognized.

An American journalist, poet, revolutionary writer, reporter and socialist, world-recognized person, he lived a very short but bright life full of crucial events and deeds. He was involved into whirls of events when the fortunes of nations were being decided. The importance of his book 'Ten Days That Shook The World' published in 1919 cannot be overestimated. It is specially of great interest for those readers all over the world who are interested in world history and like to understand the spirit of the 20th century time.

John Reed was born into a well-to-do family in Portland in 1887. At first the boy studied in a private school and then in Harvard college and Harvard University. As a student he loved swimming and water polo, composed music and lyrics and worked for 'The Harvard Monthly'. After his graduation from Harvard in 1910 John travelled abroad and visited England, France, and Spain.

Since 1913 he grew interested in politics and was sent to Mexico to report the revolution.

As soon as World War I broke out John Reed went to Europe as a correspondent for 'The Masses' and 'The Metropolitan Magazine'. The tragic exodus of the war impressed him greatly. John was courageous enough to cover the battles in France, Serbia, Germany, Romania, Bulgaria and Russia. The results of his impressions were published in the book 'The War in Eastern Europe.'

It was the autumn of 1917 when John Reed and his wife Louise Brant (also a correspondent) carried away with revolutionary ideas left for Petrograd. There they were absorbed into their work. John was lucky to interview Alexander Kerensky, Vladimir Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev. Being very sympathetic to the Bolsheviks, he portrayed them in his articles.

Moreover John became a radical leader and was arrested many times. He did his best to help form the Communist Party in the United States in 1919 that numbered over 60,000 members.

Interested in international solidarity and international affairs, he got a mandate and attended the Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow.

But soon unfortunately John Reed fell ill on his way from Turkestan and died of typhus in Moscow on 17 October 1920. To commemorate our American friend the Soviet government ordered to bury John Reed together with other heroes of the revolution at the Kremlin wall.

Bushueva Emilia Vladimirovna,

Senior English Lecturer, Foreign Languages Department