
Charles Edward Russell Pleads for Preparedness: Philadelphia Audience Gasps as Leading Socialist Declares Country Must Arm For Protection Against Germany... [Event of Nov. 29, 1915]

First published in *Philadelphia Ledger*, Nov. 30, 1915.
Reprinted in *St. Louis Labor*, whole no. 776 (Dec. 18, 1915), pg. 8.

Advocating a citizen soldiery, universal service in the army, an army and navy larger than any other in the world, and the immediate appropriation of enough money to strengthen the defense of the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, doctrines that have never been included in Socialistic platforms, Charles Edward Russell, one of the most prominent members of that party in America, astonished the audience at the Broad Street Theater yesterday [Nov. 29, 1915] by a lecture that is expected to cause a feeling of bitterness and antagonism on the part of Socialists throughout this country. There were more than 2,000 in the audience.

It was evident during the course of the lecture that the speaker had aroused considerable feeling. This was especially noticeable after he had attacked foreign-born citizens who, as Socialists, continually were finding fault with the country. He said that only the native American could feel true patriotism and the need of preparedness. Following the lecture, as is the custom, questions were sent up to him. Many of these intimated that his remarks were not those of a real Socialist and that he was employed by the "Armament Trust." These he answered with no little bitterness. At one time he became agitated and shouted: "If I cannot be a Socialist and still be free to speak my mind, then you may think, if you will, that I am not a Socialist."

He added that the German Socialists had failed utterly and actually helped the war by their silence in the Reichstag.

Predicts German Invasion.

In plain language he predicted that the United States was in imminent danger of invasion by Germany and Japan, two powers, he said, we must guard against — Germany, because the Kaiser will not stop until he has conquered the world, and Japan because she is jealous of the American nation and even now is laying plans for the gradual annexation of territories of the United States. He cited as the first step Japan's occupation of the German possession, a group of islands not far from the Philippines.

He ridiculed the expedition of Henry Ford,¹ and said he would “sooner make mud pies than join the party.” Bryan and the other pacifists came in for criticism when he said the war must go on until the end.

“This war has come home to use in the most direct and vital way,” he said. “We of America will not regard the significance of this because we are obsessed with a feeling of optimism, which really only is cowardice and prejudice. We are walking on our own road toward the pit. There now is arising the most powerful of all world powers, that of Germany. The day of the English empire is coming to an end. Already Germany is stretching across Europe; she will cross Asia, then strike at Canada, and the rest will be easy.

“The Monroe Doctrine will no more be observed by Germany than hundreds of other treaties that she has treated with contempt. Modern inventions, such as the telegraph and steamships, bring us closer to the nations embroiled in the war across the sea. We no longer are at a safe distance from them. Germany has shown she has no faith in moral bonds except the morals of the conquest. What will become of the civilization and ideals we Americans cherish?

¹ Reference is to the so-called “Ford Peace Ship,” the ocean liner Oscar II, which was chartered by Ford and set sail with a company of anti-war activists from Hoboken, New Jersey to Oslo, Norway on Dec. 5, 1915. The effort was intended to broker a dialog between belligerent nations leading to an end of the European war but ultimately produced no significant results.

Canada as Germany's Western Goal.

"Canada is Germany's western goal; and with that country in her possession there will be forts along the borders and armaments on the lakes. This will mean friction and inevitable war. From all reports, Germany is planning the commercial conquest of South America. When she will be asked to observe the Monroe Doctrine then will come a declaration of war.

"All talk of ease at this time is ridiculous, because one of two things must happen: Germany must give up Belgium, Serbia, and Poland, for which she has paid with her blood, or France must be satisfied to lose here northern territory. Also England must admit she has to bow to the Kaiser.

"We in America either must destroy what little armament we have and declare that under no circumstances will we fight and invite Germany and Japan to help themselves to what is ours, or we have to build an army and navy better than the best.

"I am a supporter of the United States and would not see it conquered, because it is the leader in democracy. Democracy must not become extinct. I admit the affairs at Ludlow, Colorado, and other evidences of the unhappy conditions of the laborers are not to the credit of the nation; but surely such things exist on the other side as well. We first have to do with an external foe and then look to our internal remedies. The toiler is patriotic. He will not stand for too many insults, and soon will demand his tools to protect his country. It makes no difference who makes the ammunition. The thing to do now is to get it. There is no danger of the people being controlled by the army. People will never submit to that."

Mr. Russell had been looked upon as the most likely candidate for President on the Socialist ticket, but from remarks that were made between his lecture yesterday it was said he would arouse so much criticism as to eliminate him. As gubernatorial candidate of New York, on the Socialist ticket, he polled the largest vote in the history of the party.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · February 2014 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.