
1919 May Day Speech.

by Kate Richards O'Hare

Published in *International Labor Day — 1919: Program for Your May 1st Meeting*. (Chicago, IL: Department of Organization and Propaganda, Socialist Party of United States, 1919), pp. 9-11.
Copy in Tim Davenport collection. Introduction appears in the printed original.

Kate Richards O'Hare is the mother of four children. She was taken from her family and cited to appear for incarceration in the Jefferson City, Missouri penitentiary on April 12th [1919], to serve five years for alleged violation of the Espionage Act.

Comrades and Friends:

More than ever are we being impressed how swiftly the world moves today. In years to come we will look back upon these months and years as those productive of most good for the great working class.

Words, phrases, and ideals have moved the people of all countries within the last two years. About two years ago wherever we went, chalked on boxes, on cars, painted on fences, displayed on banners and flaring bills, were the words: "He kept us out of war." The people of this country responded to that cry, and yet only a few months after President Wilson was reelected we found ourselves in war.

"Make the World safe for Democracy," was the next shibboleth which caught the eye of the American people. We sent our soldiers to Europe for this purpose,

and the safer we seemed to make the world for Democracy, the less democracy we seemed to enjoy at home.

"Americanism," next struck our eyes. It was blazoned in headlines across the newspapers, and in the name of "Americanism" we mobbed ministers of the gospel; we lynched and tarred and feathered workingmen and even I was threatened with a shotgun reception in Erie, Pennsylvania. Now as the word "Americanism" is slowly disappearing from our daily vocabulary, another word seems to be taking its place. It is an awe-inspiring word



Kate Richards O'Hare and her four children

From a photograph taken immediately after she was cited to place herself in the custody of a United States officer to be taken to the Jefferson City penitentiary to begin her five year sentence.

and has a very strange effect upon the idle, the exploiter, the robber, and the vicious elements. The word, however, is not feared by the toilers, they who produce the wealth of the world. The workers of the world respond to this word in a flame of holy passion. This word is effecting the world today, and occupies the minds and the hearts and the souls of every human being. This new word is — BOLSHEVISM.

What does this new word mean? If you read our daily capitalist press you are lead to believe that Bolshevism means bloodshed, murder, robbery, confiscation, and free-love. These are not new accusations hurled by the hired press against the demands made by the workers to free the world of exploiters. The same accusations were made against Socialism. The same accusations were made against the Abolitionists. The Tories of 1776 made the same accusations against our revolutionary forefathers.

The word "Bolshevism" is new, but the spirit is old, and the lies that are told about it are old lies.

For twenty years I have worked in the Cause of Socialism. I have lived more, enjoyed more, achieved more in twenty years than most women would in 500. I have lived my life in the Cause of the downtrodden; I have performed the work it has given me joy to do. I leave my family, my four children and my husband. I may not see them for five years. However, I want no sympathy. All I ask for is your comradeship, your love. I want to know that you are behind the Socialist Party in its demand for a free world. With that demand goes the demand that prison doors be opened to all political class war prisoners. When a united working class demands that their comrades be freed, that demand will be hearkened to. Remember, I said "DEMAND" that they swing open the doors. I do not say that you shall petition or beg. I repeat, demand that the prison doors be swung open and that our comrades, imprisoned only for their conscientious beliefs and their honest views, be

released. There is a vast difference between petitioning or begging and demanding. Our old Colonial forefathers went to the King on bended knees with a petition, and every time they went on bended knees they were kicked out. Workers who have petitioned and begged have not fared any better. There is power in workers that are organized, and organized workers can DEMAND, have the power to DEMAND. When once organized workers learn how to demand, there is nothing they want that they cannot have.

When I left St. Louis, my home city, I had an interview with my lawyer. "Here, Mrs. O'Hare," he said, "it is all fixed up. I have the influence lined up. Just sign this application for a pardon and I will give you my solemn word you will never go behind prison bars."

And this is what I answered: "A pardon? In God's name, what do I want to be pardoned for? I have committed no crime; I want no pardon. I demand unconditional release!"

I know I speak for Rose Pastor Stokes and Eugene V. Debs when I say that they too will not accept a pardon. We want justice, no more — no less. Justice will come. I do not know how long it may be. It may be a day, it may be a week, it may be a month, it may be longer. But no matter how long we wait, Justice is bound to come. All down through the ages when the power of despotism and tyranny grew so great that the human race could endure it no longer, there has always come an upheaval, a revolt. When the Roman Empire oppressed the slaves, there came Spartacus. When the French nobility oppressed the French workers, there came the Commune. When the English King and English profiteers oppressed the American Colonists, there came Patrick Henry and Thomas Paine. When the slave power became too autocratic and too despotic, there came Abraham Lincoln. All these leaders exemplified the spirit of the times, and the spirit of the times produced these leaders.

And today, because our industrial and po-

litical Kaisers have gone too far in their tyranny, Eugene V. Debs and many others step forward to demand that this country be made industrially free.

We Socialists for fifteen years have said that unless Socialism came, a war would come — but you laughed at us, you sneered at us. Well, Socialism did not come, but the war did. The war came and the war is bringing Socialism. It may be brought about by intelligent, peaceful action. This is the way it should be brought about. Whether or not blood is spilled depends upon the tyrants of today. Surely, we do not want any more lives wasted. And if you want Socialism to come peacefully, you will have to awaken, you will have to organize, you will have to support the Socialist propaganda financially, you will have to do all you can to educate those who are still blind to present

day events.

I am in your hands, comrades. My family is in your hands. I have labored for you for twenty years. I am one of you. When you awaken in the morning, let your first thought be of a prison cell. When you eat during the day, let your first thought be of prison fare. When you go to bed at night, think about a cold prison bunk. As you so think, remember the hundreds of comrades who are in jail awaiting your call for release. Every minute is precious. There is no time to lose. Begin demanding the release of all political class war prisoners today, and let the flame of this demand grow and grow until it sweeps from coast to coast; until it is heard by every worker. The power of organization, the demands of organized power will open the prison gates to us all.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Photo of O'Hare here was published as a full page image on page 10 of the pamphlet.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.