
Louise Bryant Sees Police Batter Down Paraders With Clubs: Brutality of Mounted Cops Exceeds That of Men in Trenches, Says Woman Writer, Eyewitness of Charge on Men, Women, and Children. [event of Oct. 8, 1919]

by Louise Bryant

Published in the *New York Call*, v. 12, no. 282 (Oct. 9, 1919), pg. 1.

I witnessed the most disgraceful scene of my life yesterday afternoon, and I have seen men die on two



fronts — I have been on the barricades — I lived through the darkest days of the Russian Revolution. Nothing in any country could compare with the brutality with which the mounted police broke up the Protest-Against-the-Blockade-in-Russia procession in Fifth Avenue.

As I stood there and watched that hideous spectacle of brutality, it seemed to me that I would burst with shame. One thought kept running through my brain: So it has come to this in America; so it has come to this!

I did not know beforehand about the procession. It was only by chance that I found myself a wit-

ness and a participant in this terrible affair. I was on an 8th Street crosstown car. At Fifth Avenue the car stopped and we could see the banners.

One caught my eye: **SAVE THE STARVING CHILDREN OF RUSSIA!** I jumped off the car. A crowd was already on the sidewalk. In the middle of the street a band of working people was passing. They were poorly dressed. That was the first thing that impressed me — and they were foreign born.

Every age was represented. I saw men and women, old men, old women, very young boys, and even small children. The banners were mild enough. I remember I thought of that. I wondered at their mildness. Here is an example: **THE BLOCKADE IS UN-AMERICAN — IT IS AGAINST ALL THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CONSTITUTION!**

We read the banners and looked at the solemn faces of the marchers. One man near me said: “My word, but this is impressive!” He spoke with an English accent. I turned round to look at him. Then I heard the clatter of horses’ hooves, I heard screams and blows, the crowd surged round me, hemmed me in, took me along. I caught at the handle of a taxicab and hung there.

“Go On, You’re American.”

After that there was the wildest confusion. The

mounted police galloped along the sidewalks. There was nowhere for that big crowd to hide.

Many ran down the steps of the Brevoort leading to the cafe, others ran up the front steps leading to the lobby, some hid behind the little iron fence, but there was not room enough for all.

From everywhere policemen on foot came running, striking out with their heavy clubs right and left, and plainclothesmen appeared. The latter armed themselves quickly with stout poles from the fallen banners. And they also began beating the people.

Their method was this: They would pull a man from behind the iron fence or from the edge of the sidewalk and begin to club him. He would try to protect himself, but would soon find it no use. A whole mob of plainclothesmen and police would attack him; then he would run, and as he ran he would receive blow after blow.

One poor fellow was running with his wife. He was so bruised that he fell to the ground, and his wife, quite a young girl, unable to bear the sight any longer, fell face down in the middle of the street and began sobbing hysterically.

By that time I had all I could stand. I ran out into the street. I expected to get beaten with the rest; but I thought it would be a relief. A big detective with a club in each hand was beating a man who had fallen on the ground. I realize now that I completely lost my head. "I'm an American. Beat me, you dirty coward!" shouted at the top of my voice. Someone ran down the steps of the Brevoort and joined me. It was Florence Rauh. "Beat me, too, you coward, you coward!" she cried in a high, broken voice. I looked at her in amazement. I have always thought of her as timid. Tears were running down her face.

"I'm ashamed not to be arrested," she was crying in dead earnest. "Arrest me!"

The detective turned to us, and the poor fellow he was beating got up and ran away. "Aw, go along!" said the detective. "You're a coupla Americans...."

Just Like Cossacks.

Florence and I picked up the woman who had thrown herself on the sidewalk. She was absolutely beside herself and kept saying in Russian: "Like Cossacks! They ran over us like Cossacks!"

We dragged her behind the iron fence. A fat woman leaned down from the balcony and looked at us with a cold smile on her face. She held in her hand the biggest gold-mesh bag I ever saw. "She isn't hurt," she said, "she's only bluffing..." Then she glanced up the street and watched with interest another poor Russian being beaten. I never saw such a cruel expression, not even at a bull fight.

Then a detective came up to me and told me to go home. He said, with his crafty animal eyes close to mine, "I'd like to put you where you belong." And a middle-aged gentleman with a cane and his chin quivering from excitement came up and asked me if I was born in America. He wanted to arrest me, but the policeman shook his head. "No, she's an American," the policeman explained. That was not the full explanation. **I had on good clothes.**

I have given here the impressions of one who was in the middle of a riot started by the police and kept up by the police. If you are in the middle of a battle, it is possible to tell only the things that happen in your immediate neighborhood. But they say the same sort of thing is happening in Pittsburgh. This is what it has come to — what shall we do about it — we Americans who still believe in freedom?

"Get him on the head! Knock out his brains! Kill him!" And the sickening noise of heavy clubs coming into contact with soft flesh, screams, sobs.... This is what it was over and over again. Will they ever forget it, those simple fold from over the sea who came to America to find peace and freedom?

What black thoughts of terror and rage must have filled their hearts as they crept silently home? Were they really reckoned with, after all, or will they not still have their day?

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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