

# It Is the Duty of Every Honest Worker in the Socialist Party to Fight for the United Front

A Reply to Scott Nearing.

By JOHN PEPPER.

Scott Nearing has written an interesting article in the New York Leader. The article deals with the Portland convention of the American Federation of Labor, the Communist issue there, and the future of the Communist movement in the United States.

Scott Nearing represents a fine culture and belongs to the few leaders of the Socialist Party who, altho they lack the courage to break with the Socialist Party, still have not become betrayers of the working class. He is an advocate of a united front with the Communists. He has not sold out to the Gompers bureaucracy. His latest article is again a very decent manifestation of his good intentions, but it is none the less a manifestation of a complete lack of Marxian analysis.

What Does Scott Nearing Say?

Scott Nearing asserts the following:

1. The American Federation of Labor Convention represented "the opinion of the rank and file of the American Federation of Labor."

2. The Communists have been driven out from the American Federation of Labor.

3. The Communists and radical workers, forced out of the official labor movement, "will be forced out into a community where there is no official opposition."

4. The radicals must get out of the American Federation of Labor—into a dual organization.

5. "There is but one outcome of this situation: Men deprived of an opportunity to express themselves thru an organization and hounded by the police, always resort to secrecy and usually to terrorist methods. There is no reason to suppose that this will not be the outcome in the United States."

Five statements—five errors. We take one statement after another and try to give the correct analysis of the facts.

Portland and the Rank and File. It is not true that the American Federation of Labor convention was a faithful mirror of the opinions or will of the rank and file of organized labor. On the contrary, the entire American Federation of Labor machine is simply a gigantic apparatus for suppressing the opinions and will

of the rank and file. The whole convention is composed in such a way that it is absolutely impossible for the will or opinion of the rank and file to be represented or manifested there.

At the convention only the international and national unions have power. The State Federations and City Central bodies have only one vote each. On the other hand, the biggest union, the United Mine Workers has no less than 4,329 votes. The United Mine Workers of America has 500,000 members, but it is represented in the American Federation of Labor by eight high international officials. These eight men, Lewis and his gang, have four times as many votes as all the one thousand State Federations of Labor and city central bodies in the whole of the United States. It is a matter of common knowledge that Lewis and his henchmen are hated by the rank and file even more than are the capitalists. Everyone knows that Lewis and his gang maintain power only by the same means as the state maintains its power—with armed slugs, with paid organizers against the radicals, and with the system of check-off. The check-off system today has two faces: the one assures a greater power for the union against the capitalists; but the other takes the power away from the rank and file, and gives it to the officials of the union. The miners are not only employees of capitalists, but also employees of the union. If the worker is radical he is expelled from the union by the officials; and when he is expelled from the union he loses his job and is even driven out of his home. (And yet, the Communists are indeed not against the check-off which assures great power to the union; but we are against the absolute power of the officials which makes the workers double slaves, slaves of the coal barons, and slaves of the union barons.) To claim that the officials of the United Mine Workers, who represented the union in Portland can express the opinion and will of the rank and file of the miners is equivalent to saying that the Duma of the Czar before the revolution represented the opinion and sentiment of the Russian people.

Every move of organized labor in the United States shows that the rank and file has opinions and inter-

ests absolutely different from those of the ruling bureaucracy of the American Federation of Labor.

In Portland three great issues which in the last year were represented in the labor movement thru the Workers Party and the Trade Union Educational League: Labor Party, Amalgamation, recognition of Soviet Russia, were defeated with an overwhelming majority. The officials assassinated all three measures. But the rank and file are for these measures.

Amalgamation was adopted by no less than sixteen State Federations of Labor, six international unions, and scores of central labor bodies.

The recognition of Soviet Russia was demanded lately again by two State Federations of Labor, three international unions, and numerous central labor bodies.

The Labor Party idea was adopted by two large international unions, four State Federations of Labor, and eight large central labor bodies.

Recently there have been created Labor Parties in West Virginia and Montana, backed by the trade unions of those states. In Minnesota a mighty Farmer-Labor Federation has been formed, supported by the whole labor movement there. In Los Angeles, Buffalo, New York, Washington County, Pa., city and county Labor Parties have been lately organized. The Federated Farmer-Labor Party was created as the first organized attempt to form a real Labor Party on a national scale. (Over the latest progress of these three great issues see J. W. Johnston's excellent article in the November issue of the Labor Herald, "Two-Score Victories for the Left Wing".)

Scott Nearing is basically wrong in asserting that the Portland convention of the American Federation of Labor represents the opinion of the rank and file of the American Federation of Labor. His assertion is in contradiction with the facts. It is a social impossibility because the Portland gathering represents a different social stratum from the rank and file of the working class. The "fat boys" in Portland are part of the capitalist class and have no more in common with the workers than have the other agents of capitalism: sheriffs, judges, army officers, ministers, or kept journalists. The "fat boys" rule the labor movement with the help of the

labor aristocracy, with the direct help of government power, with the help of the old bureaucratic machine, but—against the will and opinion of the rank and file.

Can the Communists Be Driven Out?

The second statement of Scott Nearing is that with the expulsion of William Dunne from the Portland convention, the Communists are outside of the ranks of organized labor. Scott Nearing is mistaken. The Communists have never been inside of the organized labor government as much as they are at present. The burning at the stake of Communists at Portland has more smoke than flames. William Dunne was ousted from the American Federation of Labor convention; but he is still the leader of the "Silver Bow" Labor Council. And it was after Portland that the Farmer-Labor Party was formed in Montana, with participation of Dunne and the other Communists. Dunne was ousted from the Portland convention of the labor officials, but thru his speech against the "fat boys" he penetrated into the hearts of hundreds of thousands of workers. All efforts of the reactionary bureaucracy of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union have resulted only in the expulsion of seven members of the Trade Union Educational League from the union. The Communists have learned from experience. Despite Gompers, Lewis, Sigman and Major Berry, not more than a dozen have been expelled from the trade unions in the fights of the last year in the whole country.

Scott Nearing is mistaken. The Communists are not out of the trade unions. On the contrary, they have never been inside of the trade unions more than they are at present. The Communist regiments in the trade unions are fighting regiments. The value of a troop is measured by military experts according to how much loss this troop can stand under fire. And we can assure Scott Nearing that the Communist troop in the trade unions has enough capacity for resistance and enough discipline to stand not only the loss of twelve, but of ten times and a hundred times twelve, without deserting the battle field, without leaving the trade union movement.

There is no danger. The Communists cannot be thrown out of the labor movement. They have entrenched themselves too well there. We are not getting out. On the contrary. We are only just beginning to march all our forces into the trade union movement. The Workers Party has just now begun the industrial registration of its members, as the first step towards carrying out the decision of the Communist International, that every Communist must be a member of a trade union.

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They will not form any dual organization. We will not commit the idiocy of separating the militants from the half-militant, not fully class-conscious great masses.

Of course, if the Gompers-Lewis-Berry machine does not stop at expulsion of single Communists or Communist groups, but goes still farther in its criminal, destructive work and expels the oppositional masses from the unions, the Communists will take up the fight, and will organize these masses. If such an organization comes into being, it will no longer be the old dual unionism. The old dual unionism was the separation of militants from the masses of the labor movement. This new organization, if it comes at all, will come only when the American Federation of Labor itself drives out the hundreds of thousands of workers opposed to the machine.

Not the Communists, but the Capitalists, Are Isolated.

Scott Nearing states that if the Communists are driven out of the ranks of organized labor, they come into a community where there exists no official opposition and therefore they will be forced to change their tactics and to employ the tactics of terror. Scott Nearing is mistaken in both—in the analysis of the political situation and in the characterization of the Communist movement.

The history of every revolutionary movement shows that individual terror arises only when the mass movement reaches, or when there is no immediate hope for a mass movement. The classical example of the Russian Bolsheviks shows this historical law most clearly. Assassinations and bomb-throwing were the form of struggle against Czarism just as long as there was no labor movement in Russia, and as long as the peasants, despite starvation and oppression were indifferent or even hostile to the revolutionaries. In the very moment, how-

Nearing forgets that the representatives of individual terror, at the really heroic, were not representatives of the working class, mainly intellectuals, or not of proletariat of big industry, but the backward elements of the working class. A Communist Party is real Communist Party if it does understand how to adapt its tactics to conditions. We attack or retreat, the objective situation demands. In offensive or defensive, we remain always the party of the masses, party of mass action.

How About the Socialist Party?

We dispute the statements Nearing when they are wrong, we wish to approve entirely of his statements which are right. He says that "in the United States the official labor movement has made itself an essential part of the present order." And he says further that the Workers Party is oppressed cause it agitates "in favor of a social order."

Scott Nearing is right. The official bureaucracy of the American Federation of Labor is nothing else than an unofficial agency of capitalism on the ranks of labor.

Scott Nearing is right. The Workers Party is persecuted because it fights for a new social order.

But what is the Socialist Party? Where is the position of the Socialist Party in the fight? Does Scott Nearing know—if and if he doesn't we don't write it—does the Socialist Party delegations in the Portland convention voted with Gompers, that they made themselves an essential part of the present order?

We stand today not at the beginning of an abatement of the mass movement, but rather at the beginning of a mass movement of all non-capitalist classes, which will shake up the entire fabric of American society. Scott Nearing is wrong. The ousted Communists do not come into a community where there is no official opposition. On the contrary, into a community which is saturated with opposition as never before.

Scott Nearing misses the character of the Communist Party. He even that a real Communist Party even in the period of the end of the mass movement replaces mass action by individual terror. Scott