

# 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, although 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 sense.

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."

Six statements—five errors. We will state another and try to give the correct analysis of the situation.

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 mass is simply 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 Miners 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 bunch rule by the rank and file even more than are the capitalists. Everyone knows that Lewis and his gang maintain power mainly 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 is two-thirds of the assurance of 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 doubly 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.

Even the most 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 by the labor movement thru the Workers' Party and the United 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 four 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 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 W. Johnstone'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 fact. 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 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 met 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 movement 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 and the "fat boys" he penetrated into the ranks of hundreds of thousands of workers. All efforts of the reactionary bureaucrats 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, no 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; the trade unions more than they are at present. The Communist remnants in the trade unions are fighting to recognize 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 as many as 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. We are only just taking 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.

The Communists will not form any dual organization. We will not commit the idiotcy of separating the militants from the half-militants, 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 in its criminal, destructive work itself, the oppositional masses themselves 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 its 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 are 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 recedes, or when there is no immediate hope for a mass movement. The classical example of the Russian nihilists shows this historical law most clearly. Assassinations and bomb-throwing were the form of struggle against Czarism as long as there was no mass movement in Russia, and as long as the peasants, despite starvation and oppression, were indifferent or even hostile to the revolutionists. In the very moment, how-

ever, that an organized labor movement arose, and when the peasants were seized by a revolutionary disaffection, revolutionary terror was replaced by revolutionary mass action.

In the present situation in the United States, is the mass movement of the workers and farmers on a downward or upward trend?

Every concrete analysis of the concrete facts shows that the main tendency of the development inclines, not toward isolation of the Communist Party, but toward isolation of the capitalists.

The bankrupt farmers no longer see the capitalists as their natural leaders. The workers are emancipating themselves more and more from the influence of capitalist politicians. Even the smaller capitalists of the finishing industry are in revolt against the Wall Street and against the "Pittsburgh plan" to maintain the monopoly of the Steel Trust. Politically, the ever growing isolation of the big trusts and reduced corporations is expressed thru the ever more violent factional fights in the old capitalist parties; thru the ever growing Third Party movements; thru the crystallization of the Labor Party movement. The victory of Harding in 1920, with his seven millions of majority, meant the absolute isolation of the revolutionary forces in the United States, and the beginning of capitalist leadership by all classes of society. The elections in 1924, with their opposite platform: Wall Street will be isolated, and every non-capitalist class of the forces to make a step towards the forces to make a step against the capitalist machine of the old parties.

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.

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Nearing forgets that the representatives of individual terror, at times really heroic, were not representatives of the working class, mainly intellectuals, or not of the backward elements of the working class. A Communist Party is a real Communist Party if it does understand how to adapt its tactics to 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 of 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 because it operates 'in favor of a new social order.'"

Scott Nearing is right. The official bureaucracy of the American Federation of Labor is nothing else but an unofficial agency of capitalism for the sake 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 fighting? Where is the Socialist Party? What is the position of the Socialist Party in the fight? Don't Scott Nearing know—and if he knows why doesn't he write it—that the Socialist Party delegates in the Portland convention voted with Gompers, that they made themselves an essential part of the present order? Don't Scott Nearing know—and if he knows why doesn't he indicate to the worker who is still in the Socialist Party—that the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, petty Tammany Hall of Hillequit and Berger, did not utter a single word in defense of the Communists, who are persecuted because they fight "a new social order?"

We hold it to be the duty of Scott Nearing and every honest worker within the Socialist Party to fight against the policy of silence which makes the Socialist Party "an essential part of the present order" and to fight for a united front with the Communists who struggle for a "new social order."

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