

# Pacifism or Marxism?

A Reply to Scott Nearing

In these turbulent times, when the whole civilized world seethes with revolution, it is but natural that there should be much discussion and argumentation on the part of the learned and near-learned concerning the methods and means whereby the cause of human progress may best be served. Ideas and philosophies long discredited and discarded are everywhere being revived, renovated and twisted to fit modern conditions. The air is made oppressive with the vast concourse of voices raised by exponents of all manner of isms and ologies, each insisting that his is the very latest and only true gospel of salvation. However great may be the workers need of the material things of life, surely there is a plentitude of advice and counsel.

Comes Scott Nearing, sometime professor of economics, pacifist, socialist, neo-Christian and foremost American exponent of Non-Resistance (since Clarence Darrow turned militarist), with a pamphlet entitled "Violence or Solidarity, or Will Guns Settle It," wherein is set forth in glowing terms and up-to-the-minute illustrations the doctrines of the lowly carpenter of Nazareth, and extolling the efficacy of all-embracing love as a remedy for the ills of war-weary humanity.

The burden of the learned doctor's contention is that the use of force or violence is at all times and in all places unethical; that violence has in every instance failed to crush ideas and movements; that force when invoked to advance the cause of labor has always failed to accomplish the ends sought. Last but not least it is argued that the use of force is "against human nature."

In his own special field Scott Nearing enjoys something of a reputation as a man of science. In his class-room only that which will stand the test of analysis and demonstration is accepted as evidence. But, like many another, Nearing discards the scientific method upon leaving the portals of the university. The scientist gives way to the dreamer; in support of his contentions he cites not sociologists and economists but poets and idealists—Walt Whitman, Tom Paine, Jesus, Debs—and a single disconnected sentence from Nicolai Lenin!

## Violence and the Suppression of Ideas

"Violence can have no effect on the ideas people hold and promulgate except to stimulate propaganda and advertise the cause against which violence is directed," says Nearing. This is indeed a comforting thought, but it is true?

The idea with which we are at present most deeply concerned, namely, the establishment of a communistic society, is not new. It was the idea back of Plato's ideal republic; it was current among the early Christians and attained wide circulation in Central Europe during the Middle Ages, several attempts being made to establish communistic communities. Prominent among these were the Taborites, the Hussites, the Anabaptists and the ill-fated movement led by Thomas Munzer. Some met with a temporary success, but all were in the end crushed by the superior forces of the feudal no-

bility, assisted by the Popes. In his excellent work, "Communism in Central Europe," Karl Kautsky describes the rise and fall of these movements, and makes the following rather interesting comment

"It is commonly asserted that ideas cannot be stamped out by violence. There are many proofs of the truth of this dictum, and it is comforting to all who are persecuted; but in this unqualified form it is not true. Admittedly, an idea itself cannot be annihilated by violence; but by itself alone an idea is a mere shadow, without any effective force. The strength to which a social ideal attains—and it is only this kind of an ideal which is under consideration—is dependent upon the individuals who uphold it—i. e., upon their power in society. If it is possible to annihilate a class which upholds a given idea then that idea will perish with its advocates."

The history of the Paris Commune furnishes but another illustration to disprove the assertion that ideas cannot be crushed by violence. Let Lissagaray tell how it was done.

"Twenty-five thousand men, women and children killed during the battle or after; three thousand at least dead in the prisons, the forts, the pontoons, or in consequence of maladies contracted during their captivity; thirteen thousand seven hundred condemned, most of them for life; seventy thousand women, children and old men deprived of their natural supporters or thrown out of France; one hundred and eleven thousand victims at least;—that is the balance sheet of the bourgeois vengeance for the solitary resurrection of the 18th March."

Thus were the workers of Paris crushed in 1871; even today they have not recovered from the blow. Clemenceau, premier of France, was a member of the Assembly which from Versailles directed the massacre of the Communards. Will violence crush ideas and movements? Ask "The Tiger"!

## Violence in the Labor Movement

Dynamite placed in the hands of a child or an irresponsible person will wreak death and destruction; a knife in the hands of an enraged maniac results in murder. Yet it cannot be argued that knives or dynamite are in themselves evil and dangerous. On the contrary they render valuable service when properly used. The same may be said of force; it may in one case be used to suppress and enslave mankind, in another it may serve as the instrument of liberation.

Dr. Nearing contends that the use of force is at all times immoral; that the taking of human life is unjustifiable. Speaking of the revolutionary movement in Europe he says:

"The Russians won their point through economic justice at home, propaganda and open diplomacy . . ."

" . . . If they fail the Red Army will help them fail. If they win the Red Army will stand in the way of the thing they wish to accomplish. It will be a liability, not an asset."

"The cause for which the Spartacans are fighting in Germany will triumph, not because they are fighting, but because their triumph is inevitable . . ."

Guns will not settle any of these questions . . . Even when used to a good purpose they lead to a bad end."

"Why?  
Because the theory behind the use of guns is based upon an utter misconception of human nature."

Here we have it. Man is essentially a good, noble, altruistic being; gentle and loving. Such was the teaching of the gentle Nazarene; such is the teaching of every pacifist before and since. But even the slightest acquaintance with human history proves how silly is this

conception. Even the most superficial observer of the revolutionary movement in Europe must be aware that had not the Bolsheviki, the Spartacans and the Hungarian communists had the courage of their convictions and backed up their ideas with armed force their attempts to establish proletarian domination would have been still-born.

From time immemorial men have settled their quarrels through bloodshed, and until such time as conclusive evidence is produced to show that "human nature" has been fundamentally changed in recent times, we shall be inclined to believe that force will play its part in the struggle of the workers against their present masters.

We are just as much opposed to the injudicious use of force as is Dr. Dearing. We fully agree that guns are no substitute for solidarity (which implies class consciousness). But there is a real and fundamental difference between the pacifism which says "The use of force is at all times wrong" and the purely expedient tactic which declares "Force at this time is inadvisable; we are not ready." In the proper time and place a regiment of revolutionary soldiers have a part to play—providing, of course, that they have knowledge in their heads as well as guns in their hands.

The whole matter of force or violence in the labor movement is not a question of ethics at all, but is determined by the force of circumstances, by necessity. The entire argument put forth by Nearing falls to the ground the moment we examine its foundation; it is basically unsound. All that is necessary is to remove it from the moral field and examine it in the light of historical materialism. Being an idealist, Nearing does not accept the Marxian philosophy. This in itself should be sufficient to brand him as unfit to pass judgment upon questions of proletarian tactics.—A. J. M.

Chicago policeman, to friend on car:  
"Yeah, that's the red's hangout. Print a paper there, and hold meetings to preach free love.

"The \*-! XX! !!! X@\*\*!

"Huh?

"Oh, yes, still living at the same place. Gonna move soon. Rent raised again.

"Yeah, everything's gone up. Uh-huh. "S'long."

For men to settle their differences and arrange amicably their relations would be "agin human nature."

## ON WITH THE WAR!

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its possibilities on the day when it decides that the capitalist system with its horrors to our class and its ever-accompanying blighting network of artificial starvation and famine which it creates, shall pass away from the earth!

Again and again let us insist upon the "reading of many books the earnest consideration of over many subjects" which directly lie in our path.

But above all spread the glad tidings of proletarian emancipation to all our class.

John Davis.