

AFFIRMATIVE PRESENTATION ADDRESS

SCOTT NEARING

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He was secretary of the Pennsylvania Child Labour Committee, 1905-7. Instructor in Economics in the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 1906-14; Assistant professor 1914-15; Instructor in Economics, Syarthmore College, 1908-12; Instructor in Sociology, Temple University, 1906-7; Lecturer on Social Science, Chautauqua, (N.Y.) summer schools, 1913-17; Professor of Social Science and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Toledo University, 1916-17; Lecturer in Economics and Sociology, Rand School of Social Science, 1917 to date.

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MR. SCOTT NEARING : " Is the Soviet form of Government applicable to Western civilization? " By Western civilization I presume that we mean Western Europe, Canada, the United States and those other portions of the world which have during the last century or two directly adopted the economic and social forms of European civilization.

In maintaining the affirmative of this question, I desire to present at this time three points. First, what is it that makes a particular form of Government applicable? Second, what is the Soviet form of Government? Third, why do I believe that it will fit Western civilization? And if I succeed in answering or in explaining those three points adequately, I will have succeeded in building up an affirmative of this question—Will the Soviet form of Government prove applicable to Western civilization?

First, then, what is it that makes a form of Government applicable to a particular

situation? Forms of Government correspond with certain stages in social evolution. Europe furnishes an excellent example of this general proposition. For example, if you go back a thousand years in the history of Europe, practically the entire continent was under the domination of a form of Government which has since been described as the feudal system or the feudal state.

The feudal system was a system of landlordism under which one part of the population owned the land which was worked upon by another part of the population. The part of the population which owned the land—that is, the landlord element or landlord class—ran the political Government because it ran the economic system.

At that time throughout Europe this feudal form of Government was applicable to European civilization. It was based economically on agriculture. It was based socially on a class division, primarily into a class of land owners and a class of peasants. I therefore suggest that at this stage of the development of European Government the character of the occupation of the people, the agricultural character of industry, was the primary determinant of the form of Government.

In this form of Government, or in this

form of society including this form of Government, there was the beginning of another form of Government. One by one there sprang up what were known as the free cities. These were centres first of commerce and later of handcraft industry.

Into these centres there came people from all parts of Europe and Asia, settled down, took up various branches of commercial and industrial life, and formed the second type of Government that Europe has produced in the last ten centuries—a form of Government built on commerce and on the beginnings of modern specialized industry.

And one by one these cities grew up, not alone in one part of Europe, but all over Europe, from east to west and from north to south. The free city Government grew up where industry and commerce grew up. And in this second form of Government we have a second example of the general proposition that forms of Government correspond to stages in social evolution.

The free city, that is, the centre of commerce and industry, expanded. Britain became a commercial and industrial country—Belgium, Holland, France, Germany, Northern Italy and so on following. And as this change occurred in the form of

production, in the form of life, as agriculture was pushed more and more into the background and commerce and industry took its place, a third form of Government arose which we call the bourgeoisie state.

In one case, in England, it took the form of a limited monarchy. In another case, in France, it took the form of a Republic. But essentially the basis of the state remained the same. It was organized in the interests of certain commercial and business classes. It performed their work and did their bidding. Hence, we have a third illustration of the general proposition that the forms of Government follow the lines of social evolution.

As I said at the outset, these forms have appeared in all parts of Europe—not at the same time, because feudalism lasted in some parts of Europe longer than it lasted in others. But when feudalism gave place to industry and commerce the feudal state merged into or evolved into the modern capitalist state.

I take these illustrations and make this detailed statement because I wish to found my whole argument on this major proposition: that the forms of Government correspond to the stages in social development. They do not correspond to ethnic qualities.

They do not correspond to linguistic units. They do not correspond to any of the racial or religious differences that are ordinarily alleged as the lines of demarkation between nationalist groups. The forms of Government do correspond to certain forms of economic and social evolution. The stage at which Europe now is is this stage of the capitalist state. We ordinarily call it nation.

Why did the Soviet form of Government then appear in Russia? These things do not happen. They correspond with certain stages in social evolution.

Parenthetically, let me say here that forms of society sometimes die, break down, disintegrate, disappear. Feudalism disintegrated and disappeared thus in France toward the end of the eighteenth century. Forms of society break down and disappear. And various causes induce this breakdown. Sometimes they break down through internal decay. Sometimes they break down through the impact of external forces. The breakdown of the old Roman system was due to both forces, decay from within and attack from without.

Russia, a country which is still eighty-five per cent. agricultural, retained the essential elements of feudalism into the

twentieth century. And therefore into the present century there came the old feudal bureaucracy of Russia—a group of landlords running a country stretching over eight millions of square miles and a vast population of one hundred and thirty millions, most of them peasants, and all of them under the thumb of this little landlord bureaucracy.

Those of you who have read Russian literature, Gogol, for example, or any of the other satirists of Russian life, or those of you who are familiar with Russian history, know that the Russian bureaucracy was not efficient. It was centuries old and it had failed to develop with the evolution of the rest of Europe. It had held Russia back, keeping it agricultural, keeping it feudal, fending off the evolution that had gone on in Germany, in Belgium and England and in other capitalist countries.

But with the beginning of the present century there began in Russia the new business life. And the revolution of 1905 was essentially a movement of the Russian businessmen to shake themselves loose from the millstone of bureaucratic inefficiency that was hanging about their necks. They, too, wanted a chance to use the coal and the iron and the oil and the timber of Russia as the

businessmen in other countries had done. And since the Czar and his ineffective ministers tied them up with red tape, they were anxious to get the Czar put in a position where he couldn't interfere with legitimate business enterprise.

So that Russia in the opening years of the twentieth century was partly feudal—the Czar was a feudatory monarch—and partly adolescent capitalist. The Russian business life had just begun to show its head, just begun to feel the rising tide of its power. Russia was thus between eras neither feudal nor capitalist.

And when the war struck Russia, it destroyed both feudalism and capitalism. The Bolsheviks did not destroy the Russian ruling classes. The Russian ruling classes destroyed themselves between 1914 and 1917 through their inability to mobilize and to handle their military and internal life. The people of Russia starved. They lacked clothing. They lacked machinery. The railroads broke down. Fuel was scarce. The whole life of Russia from 1915 to 1917 was in chaos. And, finally, when early in 1917 the Russian armies began to quit and go home, it was because the Russian people were convinced that the whole business wasn't worth going on with. And they

were convinced of that because they were hungry and cold and sick and war-weary.

That is what happened in Russia. The old order—partly feudal, partly capitalist—crumbled under the blows of the war. And when Kerensky came into power in March, 1917, he came into power in a bankrupt country with the transport and industry wrecked and the army everywhere in full retreat.

Russia in 1917 had lost more heavily than any other belligerent country because of its inefficiency, because of its incompetence. And the breakdown of Russia was the breakdown of an established social order under the crushing weight of two and a half years of war.

Therefore, when the old order broke down, since there were a hundred and thirty million people who had to go on living, they rustled around and found a new order. The Soviet form of Government is the first expression of that new social order. And it came in Russia because the old social order broke down first there. If the old social order had broken down first in Germany, the new social order would have come first in Germany. If it had broken down first in England, it would have come first in England. The old social order ceased to work in

Russia, and the hundred and thirty millions of people there had, to have something. And they adopted a new form, and that form we call the Soviet form of Government.

What is the Soviet form of Government? That is the second question I want to present. I have tried to explain why it is there. What is it? I suppose Mr. Russell and I will not differ on this point. We can hardly do so at this stage of the game. And so I imagine that I can define it very briefly, and I shall set out with that in view.

The Soviet form of Government is a temporary or transition form to bridge over the abyss between capitalism and socialism. The Soviet form of Government is not a socialist or communist Government. The Soviet form of Government is a transition Government. It is a bridge over an abyss, working toward communism and away from capitalism.

It is highly centralized, therefore. It is in the form of a dictatorship. This dictatorship is exercised by the delegates of peasants and workers—originally of soldiers, peasants and workers; now of peasants and workers—and is dominated by the communist party, which consists of about six hundred thousand men and women who have in view some-

thing which they describe as economic emancipation of the producing classes.

That means the elimination of all exploitation, that people shall own their own jobs and control their own product and decide what policy industry shall follow, just as we are entitled to decide what policy politics shall follow. I am not saying, understand, that they have this in Russia. I am saying that this is the goal or objective of the communist party: To establish communism. No communist asserts that they have communism in Russia. All of the leading communists are on record as saying that they have not communism, particularly under the new economic policy.

Russia, the Russian form, the Soviet form is a dictatorship under the control of the industrial workers, primarily—not of the peasants, although the peasants participate—a dictatorship dominated by the communist party aiming at economic emancipation.

Three outstanding characteristics differentiate the Soviet form from our form of Government. First, local constituencies are economic and not geographical. The Soviet of Moscow is elected by street car workers, school teachers, steel workers, building trades workers—not by residents of the first,

second, third and fourth assembly districts as in New York. (Laughter.)

The basis of representation is economic or occupational, and not geographic or regional as under our system. I believe that constitutes one of the great contributions of the Russian system, because life to-day is divided most sharply along occupational and not most sharply along geographic or regional lines.

The second outstanding characteristic of the Soviet Government is its proposition to organize economic life as we have organized political life. In the Middle Ages, political life was in the hands of little princelings and dukes and one kind of ruler and another. We have taken that chaotic localized political form and unified it under a federal, state, city, county, borough, village, system of administration.

Our political life in England and Germany and the United States and Canada and Australia is scientifically worked out, planned, blue-printed. The Russians propose to work out, plan and blue-print economic life. We still let little bankers, manufacturers and other private profiteers and enterprises carry on their private bucketeering activities in economic life. The Russians propose to eliminate profiteering in economics as we

have eliminated profiteering in politics. That is their second great contribution—to scientifically organize the economic life of Russia.

Their third essential contribution is contained in the phrase which they quote in their constitution: "He that will not work, neither shall he eat." Under our system of society the biggest owner gets the biggest return, though he may make no contribution to society. But because he owns property, he has great income.

Under the Soviet form, their fundamental law, their constitution asserts that such a man can't even vote or hold office, but that the rights of the country are restricted, the political rights, to those who perform productive and useful service.

Those, in my judgment, are the three characteristics that differentiate the Soviet form from our form. First, economic occupational constituencies. Second, the scientific organization of economic life. Third, the necessity of every able-bodied adult to render some service to the community.

This form is the product of seven years of war, civil war, famine, disease and hardship. The Russians have beaten this form out of the very flesh and marrow of their lives. They have put into it millions of

lives and tens of millions of living units of suffering agony, while we have been going to the movies and living on the fat of the land. The Russians have hammered this thing out of their necessities.

When will it fit Western civilization? Not now. When did it fit Russia? It fitted Russia when the old order broke down. It will fit Western civilization when the old order breaks down. If peace and prosperity and progress are the outstanding characteristics of Western civilization, the Soviet form of Government will never fit Western civilization. If peace and prosperity and progress can be maintained in England and France and Belgium and the United States, the Soviet form of Government will never fit. If, on the other hand, international war and class war and hard times break down the fabric of Western society, then the Soviet form will be inevitable.

And my whole argument centres around this proposition: that the Soviet form of Government is a transition form of Government between capitalist society and socialist society, and that when capitalist society breaks down we will have the Soviet form of Government.

What are the chances that capitalist society will break down? I suggest that you

read Mr. Bertrand Russell's latest book, *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*. (Laughter and applause.) If you are still unconvinced, a fellow countryman of his, Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, these two have prepared a book called, *The Decay of Capitalist Civilization*. And if you are still unconvinced, Signor Nitti, ex-Premier of Italy, has written a book, *The Decadence of Europe*.

Any one of the three books, I think, is sufficient to convince any intelligent man or woman of the inevitableness of the presence of decay in European society, and all three together I think will be intellectually convincing to any person who is still capable of developing new lines of thought. And if, perchance, you are not yet convinced, I suggest that you read the Dawes Report. It is only fourteen thousand words long and not bad reading. And in the Dawes Report there are the germs of enough future wars, international and class wars, to destroy any civilization that ever existed, let alone the civilization of Europe. (Applause.) We are getting ready for the next international war now. On every envelope that you get out of the Post Office, it says, "Let's go, Citizens Military Training Camps."

International war, class war, civil war and hard times are the three battering rams that are destroying your civilization. And although you happen to live in the richest country in the world, and although you happen to live on the easy side of life, and although things seem to be going well with you now—the Germans felt the same way in 1913. And that is only ten years away. And ten years hence a lot of you will be singing a different tune, if that is the tune that you follow at the present time.

So I say all over Western Europe when capitalism breaks down, as it must, there will be the dictatorship of a group of industrial workers under a highly organized and sternly disciplined party like the communist party in Russia, and they will build a society based on economic constituencies, and they will organize under engineering scientific direction the economic life of the world, and we will have a new social order which we might call communism or socialism, but the transition stage to that new social order will be characterized by the essential characteristics of the Soviet form of Government. (Applause.)