

## NEGATIVE REFUTATION

THE CHAIRMAN : Far be it from me to intrude into this debate. (Laughter.) It is a pretty enough fight as it stands. Thanks to the close and skilful reasoning of our intellectual gladiators, it seems to me that we have gotten down to an agreement upon everything except one point. And that is a point upon which Mr. Scott Nearing has the affirmative. (Laughter.) He must prove that the present form of Soviet Government is applicable to this hemisphere, not that all civilization is going to break down. (Laughter.) They agree about that. We are through with that. We may as well have that understood. But when it does break down, is that particular form of Government applicable to this country? And on that you want to hear Mr. Russell. (Applause.)

MR. RUSSELL : Ladies and Gentlemen : I am afraid I must begin by saying that perhaps our Chairman has unintentionally represented a somewhat larger measure of agreement between us than I think we might be quite willing to recognize. I think there

is still quite sufficient difference between us to keep up the debate. (Laughter.)

I feel inclined to congratulate Mr. Scott Nearing upon what I thought was a rather fine, a rather admirable example of question-begging. - He assumed, in the first place, that our Western society is certainly going to break down, that that we may take for granted. He then went on to suppose that he could sweep aside as irrelevant the arguments that if that should occur, people would not be in the mood to introduce the Soviet form of Government.

Now I have two things to say, which are really only repeating what I said before. And that is this: First of all, I do not regard it as in any degree certain or even as more likely than not that our Western civilization will break down. It is merely one of those things that you have to take account of as a possibility. The art of prediction in human affairs is not advanced to that point where you can say such and such a thing will happen. And the man who tells you such and such a thing will inevitably happen thereby proves himself unscientific. (Applause.)

So I don't say our civilization will certainly break down, and I do not think it is at all certain. Further, if by any

chance it does break down in any given country, it will do so only as the result of defeat in war. Now, it is not very likely that all the Western nations will be defeated in war at the same moment. You may assume that some of them, at any rate, will be victorious. (Laughter.)

And in that case, in the victorious nations the capitalists will of course obtain a new lease of life. It will be the defeated nations which will want to go over to the new system. And I do not see—I will not say that it is with regret that I say this, but I do not see any near prospect of defeat in war for your country. (Laughter.)

I think it is extremely improbable that your country will be defeated in war at any time that we can look forward to. That being so, I do not think you will have a cataclysm in this country. And if you do not have a cataclysm, then you must find some other methods of transition to socialism.

Now Mr. Scott Nearing, in one of his remarks, which I shall regard as a begging of the question, represented me as saying that socialism cannot be carried out. I said it cannot be carried out by the Bolshevik method in the West. I did not say it cannot be carried out. I most firmly

believe that it can be carried out. But I believe it can be carried out only by gradual methods and not by the methods of revolution.

Revolution is applicable to societies at a certain elementary stage of development. But when they become so organic as our developed industrial societies have become, revolution means too much destruction. It would mean obviously, in the course of it, destruction of all our industrial plants, bombs dropped on power stations and all the rest of it, and it would mean that half our population would starve and the remainder would be unable to apply industrial methods because the industrial plants would be gone.

For those sorts of reasons, revolution of a violent kind is hardly applicable to an advanced industrial community. It is applicable to communities such as Russia was at the time when the revolution occurred. But it is not, I think, applicable with any advantage to highly developed and technically organized communities. They have to proceed by another route. And I say I will not so despair of human nature, I will not so despair of human intelligence as to suppose that you cannot persuade people in time of peace that the economic system we

have is not the best that there could be. I believe we can. If we are diligent, and if we are wise and eloquent and patient, we can persuade the populations of the Western world, even during peace and during prosperity, that the existing economic system is not best, and that they will do well to adopt the methods of socialism. (Applause.)

That is a slow task. I do not say it can be done in a day. But I say it can be done. And I say that any other method whatever, such as Mr. Nearing suggests, will not lead you to the goal.

He says it is futile to talk about bows and arrows. And at the same time, and almost in the same breath, he says we ought to face facts. Well, you can't have it both ways. If he wants to face facts, he must face the bows and arrows (laughter), because he thinks (and I do not think, and he did not argue this point), that you could survive a social cataclysm in our advanced countries and emerge with a highly organized and highly technical system of economic communism. I think that you would not emerge that way, because the destruction of life, because the struggle for existence during the cataclysm would be so terrible that men would not be in the mood for

any organized or rational form of Government.

He quoted Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, saying there would have to be a committee of public safety. No doubt there would. No doubt there would be a committee of public safety. But I do not see that committee of public safety in a position to establish the orderly works of peaceful, industrial production from one day to the next on a basis of communism, or indeed on any other basis. The whole machinery for industrialism would be swept away in the cataclysm, and you would have instead an agricultural community of peasant proprietors, because they alone would survive. That is the thing you have to expect if you proceed to wait for the cataclysm.

Now I say the cataclysm that Mr. Nearing alludes to can only be brought about by unsuccessful war. And there is one very simple way of dealing with that situation—do not embark upon war. (Applause.) Of course, if you embark upon war, it may be successful war. That is perhaps just a little bit better than unsuccessful war. But you can be quite sure that you will not get into an unsuccessful war if you do not get into a war at all. And that is the only way you can be sure.

And that is one reason why I preach to all the nations of the world to try to preserve the peace. I do not believe that through war you are going to arrive at these good results which Mr. Nearing has in mind. I believe that war is going to be more and more destructive and more and more to sweep away civilization and to take you further and further away from that scientific organization of industry which he and I jointly believe to be the goal. You are not going to arrive there by that method.

Mr. Nearing, I say again, invited us to face facts. Now I invited him to face the fact that there is no short and quick road to the millennium. You cannot get there through a fiery gateway that suddenly opens up into a happy valley. That is the sort of mythological conception upon which this whole idea is based. I don't think human society moves in that way. Human society moves towards good things slowly, towards bad things fast. (Laughter and applause.)

And so it seems to me that we have got to be patient in this matter. We have got to realize that if you are going to get to the sort of socialism that we wanted to see, that he and I both wanted to see, if

you are going to get the advanced industrial nations to adopt that (and it is useless for us to adopt it if they do not), then you have got to do it by peaceful propaganda. You have got to do it by persuasion, and you have got to do it in time of peace, and even in time of prosperity.

And that is a matter of appealing to people's intelligence. It is a slow matter, because people's intelligence is not so great as we could wish. But it will be a mistake to think they have none. I think his view of the situation is based upon too pessimistic a view of human nature. He assumes that you will never get people to improve their lot unless they are absolutely on the verge of starvation. Now that is not true at present of the people who already have a very fair amount of money. They are quite willing to take strong measures to get more money. Why should you assume that those who have less money will not become equally ready to take such measures? It is only a matter of getting the same energy and the same enterprise and the same imagination spread more widely throughout the population. And that is a thing which you may hope to see coming about.

We are only in the infancy of the industrial system. It is only a hundred years

since it began to exist in any modern form. A hundred years is a very short time in the life of the human race. Our habits are not adapted to it. Our thoughts are still agricultural, not industrial. It will take us a long time to get the habits of thought that are appropriate to the industrial methods. When we have those habits of thought, then I think we shall adopt the methods that Mr. Scott Nearing and I have in common.

But if you try to force them upon a population that does not understand them, if you try to seize the reins of Government in some moment of crisis and compel people to go in directions in which they do not want to go, your work will be the work of a moment, it will be swept away from one moment to the next and the whole thing will have to be begun again from the start.

That is why I compared the work of the Bolsheviks to the work of Cromwell. The Puritans had very noble ideals. They were very fine people. But their ideals were not those of the people. And after the people had experienced them for a little while, they said, "Never again." And that is what I am afraid will be said to communism in Russia, because it has been tried too soon. It is no use to try things until

people are more or less ready for them. You have got to develop, you have got to grow, people's thoughts have got to come up to the point where the thing is possible.

It seems to me that the outlook which Mr. Nearing represents—which I must not call Marxian (laughter)—it seems to me that that outlook comes from a time before biology had got the hold upon our thoughts that it has in our time. In the time of that author who shall be nameless (laughter), there was, as you know, a habit of following the philosophy of Hegel. Now Hegel's philosophy was logical, and it went by sharp transitions from this thing to that thing and then to the other thing and it was all a matter of hard outlines, sharp, rigid outlines, such as you get in logic.

Well, later on, after Marx's thought was fully formed, came the biological outlook which is associated with Darwin, a habit of viewing human society as a thing that grows, a thing that develops like a tree, a thing that has a life by itself, a thing that moves in a certain manner not prescribed by the laws of logic or reason, but prescribed by the law of life.

And I think you must remember that human societies are of that sort. You must remember that you cannot get human

societies to move in the manner of a logical transition, but only in the manner of a change in the way of life that must come gradually and bit by bit.

I know I have been accused, even here this afternoon, of being a logician. (Laughter.) I cannot deny it. I have sometimes pursued that study. But, in spite of having pursued logic at times, I do not think that logic is everything. And I think that when you are dealing with the development of human societies you must have some sense of life, you must have some understanding of how life grows, of the way that our feet have to be planted in the soil if there is to be anything real in our lives.

And I do find a lack of that in the philosophy which believes that by sudden revolutions everything can be effected. By sudden revolutions you can change the names of things, but you cannot change people's whole habits and movements. And you find that the old things come back with the new names. And that has always been the danger with revolutions.

You know how in the French Revolution you got not only the committee of public safety in the middle of it, you got Napoleon at the end of it. And the difference from

the old regime was nothing like so great as people would have had you believe. It is true they accomplished the establishment of peasant proprietorship, and that has been accomplished in Russia. I believe that to be probably the only thing that will permanently survive out of that whole revolution. And that could have been got with nothing like the expenditure of so much sorrow and suffering, with nothing like the tragedy in the life of Russia that has been involved in the revolution that has there taken place.

I am afraid that revolutions are a tribute to our sense of drama. We all have a sense of drama. We all have a love for the event which is noteworthy, which will be a fine thing on the screens. And we like to see things happening in that way, suddenly and finally and splendidly and heroically. But that is not the way that the really great work of the world is done. The great work of the world is a much less showy thing. And I believe that that will be so also with the introduction of socialism into our Western communities.

We might introduce the name by a revolution, but the reality we shall have to introduce by an evolution. And that is why I do not believe that the method

adopted in Russia is the method to be adopted in this Western country here or in my own country. I think that those who say that that is the method to be adopted are hypnotized by the great example of a nation at a different stage. We have come to a later stage, and we should not follow those who are still at an earlier stage.

I had that opinion when I came here. And, in spite of the extreme persuasive eloquence of Mr. Nearing, I still retain that opinion now. (Applause.)

THE CHAIRMAN: And thus ends this great intellectual debate, with our best thanks to both participants. (Applause.)