

## Introduction

The printed record of Scott Nearing's trial is of genuine value, not only because of the defendant's lucid exposition of the philosophy of Socialism, but also because it presents an authentic record of an American political trial. In the venerable court room of the United States District Court, in the City of New York, a prominent Socialist, a scholar and writer, was on trial, ostensibly on the charge of a grave felony. For days he spoke to twelve men "good and true," his fellow citizens chosen to pass judgment on his guilt or innocence, and to a judge officiating as the representative incarnate of the austere majesty of American law. He spoke technically in his own defense. But he did not defend himself. His personal conduct and motives, his personal interest and fate were barely touched on. They were the merest incidents of the trial. It was of larger and more vital things that Scott Nearing spoke. He told of the wrongs and sufferings of the world of labor, and exposed the organized crime of its oppressors. With uncontrovertible facts and figures and irresistible logic he arraigned the ruling classes of all countries as the authors responsible for the ruin of Europe and the misery of the world. He spoke of the aspirations and ideals of the submerged masses of the people everywhere, and of their determined struggles to redeem mankind from the age-long horrors of oppression and slaughter. He expounded the gospel of International Socialism under the solemn sanction of the formal oath and under the partial guidance of the prosecuting attorney and the presiding judge. He proved the red creed of human

brotherhood in accordance with all the technical requirements of legal procedure.

The trial of Scott Nearing was but one of many similar performances enacted in the courts of the United States during the war and—after it. The trials of Eugene V. Debs, Rose Pastor Stokes and Kate Richards O'Hare; of Victor Berger, Adolph Germer and other officials of the Socialist Party; of Max Eastman and his co-workers on the staff of the "Masses"; the wholesale trials of the I. W. W. leaders, were all in principle identical with that of Scott Nearing, and it was largely fortuitous that the latter was acquitted, while all the former were convicted and sentenced to savagely heavy prison terms.

Not a single enemy agent was convicted under the provisions of the so-called Espionage Law, which was ostensibly enacted to cope with the operations of the German spy system in the United States during the war, but more than one thousand prosecutions were initiated under that act against radicals and pacifists. And yet Thomas W. Gregory, the U. S. Attorney General responsible for the prosecutions, solemnly and seriously asserts that the persons so tried and convicted are "in no sense political prisoners." If the term "political prisoner" as distinguished from the common criminal convict denotes a person jailed for the offense of holding and expressing political, social or economic views opposed to those of the party in control or classes in power, then the numerous persons convicted individually and "en bloc" in political, economic and religious groups, under the Espionage Law and now held in federal prisons, are beyond cavil and quibble political prisoners, and the prosecutions instituted under that act were and are political trials.

To judge from all indications these trials are only the harbingers of an era of systematic governmental

persecution of all radical opinion and radical movements in the United States. Even before the sinister Espionage Law has ceased to serve its purpose, new laws, more candid and more drastic are proposed in order to stifle the voice of the rising working class rebellion, and where there is no convenient statute to cover the persecution of radical dissenters with even the most flimsy cloak of legality, our authorities national and local, have shown little hesitancy in substituting arbitrary might for legal warrant. In the capitalist soviet of America the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie reigns supreme.

The era of wholesale and relentless persecution is neither unexpected nor entirely unwelcome to the Socialists of the United States. It is an unavoidable phase of historic development through which the Socialist movement of every advanced country has had to pass. It marks a point in the growth of the proletarian sentiment of revolt which strikes the ruling classes mad with fear and drives them to unreasoned and frantic efforts to strangle an irresistible social and intellectual tide by sheer brute force and physical violence. Such persecutions eventually collapse in the inevitable reaction which they are bound to produce against their own excesses. Their effect on the Socialist movement is of infinite value in purifying, unifying and extending the movement.

It is only a few decades since the government of the autocrat of all Russia afforded the young and idealistic Socialist propagandists of his empire the opportunity to preach the gospel of the Social revolution through the medium of the famous political mass trials of the seventies of the last century, and since he adopted the policy of "crushing" Socialism by hanging, exiling and imprisoning the Socialists.

It is barely a generation since the German Imperial

Government under the leadership of the Iron Chancellor inaugurated the twelve-year governmental campaign for the suppression of Socialist propaganda through the action of the courts and of the police.

Today the Romanoffs and the Hohenzollerns have been swept into oblivion and their political, industrial and military junkers shorn of their power. In Russia the proletariat governs, and in Germany the contest for the control of the former Empire lies solely between the Socialists of the different schools.

And now it is capitalist America that is undertaking the hazardous task of destroying Socialism by force, plunging into the adventure with all the enthusiasm of boundless ignorance, with all the ruthlessness of blinded hate and with defiant heedlessness of the warnings of the past.

Verily the rulers can never learn the lessons of history.

MORRIS HILLQUIT.

Saranac Lake, March 12, 1919.