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## **PROF. SCOTT NEARING ON "PUBLIC OPINION"**

November

At the dinner preceding the address, Vice-President W. T. A. Fitzgerald presided. Professor A. B. Hart, of Harvard University, Rev. William H. van Allen, Rev. E. S. Meredith, and John Kendrick Bangs, spoke.

At the meeting in the auditorium, Prof. A. B. Hart presided. He said:

"The universities of this country stand upon a great variety of footings. The great State universities, depending directly upon public taxation might, if such a thing were possible, be kept in leading strings. If there is any justification for the principle that a professor in a great institution of learning is to be expected to deal out the kind of truth which is expected by those who appoint him, it would be in the great State universities. And yet I think it is true that none of our great institutions of learning are so free from this restriction placed on its men.

"There is, of course, the lamentable case in Utah, where the conditions and the difficulties are not at all those of a professor saying what he likes, but that of a professor saying what is or is not acceptable to an enormous organization, including perhaps a majority of the people of the State. With such exceptions in general our State universities are freer from difficulties on this point than the endowed universities. And after all the reason for that is simple:

"The State universities are expected to teach all manner of things. They must respond to everything, to the various activities of the Commonwealths from which the university professors are designated.

"The endowed professors, the endowed colleges, however, are tied up with specific endowments, endowments given for the purpose of inculcating particular doctrines, endowments intended to perpetuate views and opinions, creeds which in many cases in the nature of things are worn out. Therefore, endowed institutions are those which are the greatest sinners in this question of the free speech of those who serve it. The question, therefore, is not absolutely so simple as it seems. There is ground for the statement on behalf of Boards of Trustees that they have great funds given them in order to inculcate a particular form of truth, and that their duty is to find a man who believes that form of truth in order that he may teach it. That is the idea of our great theological institutions. If you are going to be a professor in a theological institution in Princeton — why, when you are in Rome, do as the Princetonians do. That is the only safe criterion.

"The only question in regard to free speech in this particular is, of course, brought to our mind because the speaker of this evening has illustrated in his own person the consequences of a rigid adherence to saying what one believes on occasions and in places not agreeable to certain other persons. The real fundamental difficulty is the question whether our institutions are founded in order to teach things or to teach men, whether it is the duty of Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, any college you may mention, to train up persons who will convey a budget of what is believed to be true from generation to generation, or whether a professor or the students who listen to him alike, are there in order that they may cultivate the habit of making up their own minds.

"I have had a long experience of teaching, and I can tell you one thing, and I presume that any minister, any lawyer, any leader of a public body here would feel the same, namely, that the one thing that kills the vitality and effectiveness of teaching is for the teacher to say a thing about which he is doubtful."

### **PROFESSOR NEARING'S VIEWS**

Professor W. Scott Nearing, recently of the University of Pennsylvania, but now of the University of Toledo, after being handsomely introduced by Professor Hart, said:

"The free opinion of a free people, laid down, expressed, and followed out so far as we know, is the final word in government. We do not want autocracy, we do not want despotism, we do not want aristocracy, but we say we want democracy. That means that the government shall be founded on the opinion of a free people, and that means that people shall be essentially free to govern if they are to reap sound judgment.

"If I say I have opinions, or if you say you have opinions about the baseball series, or about the war, or about the weather, or about any other thing, you mean that you have taken the facts on one side and the facts on the other, and you have weighed the evidence. Perhaps you have brought to play your convictions, your prejudices, and your notions. You have taken all those things, you have weighed one against the other; that is, you have formed an opinion. That is your opinion.

"Now, public opinion is something more than that, something different from that, because public opinion is the opinion of a group of people, and the group differs essentially from individuals, because in the formation of public opinion there are four men who believe in high tariff, and here are ten men who believe in free trade. Now, we will have free trade unless the men who believe in high tariff are in a position so to dominate the situation that their word carries more weight per man than the word of the ten who believe in free trade. In other words, if the four men are prominent manufacturers, and the ten men are cotton spinners, we will

have high tariff. The opinions of the people of the community, weighed according to their influence in the community, so many on this side of the problem, so many on that side of the problem, the result of those forces, the net result, the net total of those forces, is the public opinion of the community. That is, instead of being facts against facts, as when you form your own opinion, it is man against man, so many men with this opinion and so many with that. And that is what public opinion means. It means that men in this community have or had expressed themselves on election day with some on one side and some on the other, with the result that public action is the product of the concensus of that public opinion.

## THE ORIGIN OF PUBLIC OPINION

"Where does public opinion come from? First, from the heredity that a man has. Second, from the surrounding influences. Third, from his character or will or whatever you are pleased to call it. We are all of us supplied with a certain hereditary kind of fiber, of which our ancestors and of which we and our descendants are made. And some people are born with temperament and instincts and hereditary characteristics so strong that you cannot get away from them. We have, for example, the born artist, a man who is born or has worked up to the point where his friends have to tolerate every idiosyncrasy, every mean stunt that he chooses to pull off, a man who is dangerous unless he is left practically alone. You get into an argument with such a man, and he has expressed his opinion, so you change the subject and ask about the weather. You say that he is a born artist in exactly the same way that you would say that the baby is crying. It is a hereditary thing, and something that is given to him, and he cannot get away from it. Redheadedness — red hair is a hereditary characteristic. Temperament and instinct are inborn and hereditary characteristics. We start with those, and those things are shaped by the influences that we come in contact with during our lives as we go along.

"Now, the shaping influences, the things that direct those hereditary characteristics, I should like to divide into two groups.

"In the first place, you have what we call **social momentum**. That is, you have tradition, convention, custom, the things that people always have done in a community, that body of social doings, of social goings on, as you say, that shapes the individual. For example, shortly after this war broke out, I was talking with a man and he summed up his point of view this way: He said, 'After all, at bottom we are just hyenas.' He had the reputation of being that kind of man among his fellows, and I take it that it expresses his opinion. But he went on to say that we like killing, and after that, when I went back to college that fall, I said to one of the boys — at that time the Mexican trouble was very critical — and I said, 'Are you going to enlist?' He said, 'Yes, indeed.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'Well, I have

been waiting for a long time for a chance for a free fight with no police around.'  
(Laughter.)

"Now, that, in a way, verified the statement of the gentleman that we were all hyenas. And I have been thinking about that ever since. How far is it true that we want to go out and kill our fellow men?"

## WOMEN'S REVOLT

"One of the reasons why I think that we perhaps can shake ourselves loose from that tradition, from that custom, from that social momentum, that doing all things as we have always done them, is because of the extraordinary results that have been obtained in the last few years by another part of the population. I refer to the women.

"We have trained the women carefully to do as we say, and, for centuries women have accepted man-made convention and womanmade convention with perfectly blind, unquestioned confidence. They accepted the old traditions in the Scriptures about woman obeying her husband and about keeping her hat on in church, and doing other things that showed she was in a different position from man.

"We have a boy and we take him and put some rough clothes on him and buy him a suit of corduroy and put him out to play. A friend of mine, with a boy four or five years old, said: 'I began to despair of that boy; I never saw him dirty. The other day I came home and he had been in a mud battle, and I have hope of him now.' We put him in corduroy and he goes out on the back lot, and he comes home with his face cut and bruised, and we use peroxide and sew up his clothes and put on clean linen and start him out again, and when he goes out the door, you say: 'He is a manly little chap.'

"The father says to him, 'Son, what will you do?' And later he says, 'Son, what will you do?' And he keeps after his boy, and finally he looks over this and that profession and says, 'I am going to be a doctor,' or a mechanical engineer, or one thing or another. What do you do with the girl? We set her in the corner and give her a doll, and we say, 'Now, sister, don't soil your frock.' And if she goes out and climbs fences and trees and tears her frock, we say: 'What an awful tom-boy.' And mother says, 'Daughter, what are you going to wear?' And, 'Daughter, what are you going to wear?' and then, 'What are you going to wear?' And so, while Son is determining what he is going to do, Daughter is making up her mind what she is going to wear. And generation after generation she has spent her time following the fashions while Son has learned to follow a profession. (Laughter.)

"Now that was just as firmly fastened on our people as the training for killing.

Just as firmly set in our minds, and as integral a part of our momentum. Yet, you know, that in the last few years Daughter has come forward and said, 'I want a job,' and Father says, 'My dear child, I am perfectly able to support you.' 'That is all right,' says Daughter; 'I don't need your money, I am going to support myself.' She goes through high school, she goes through college. She comes out and takes a job. Perhaps she does as one of the girls in New England who represented one of the first families in New England — I don't know just what that means. She got through college and started a tea-house in her own town. I believe that is a particularly bad thing in New England, but here she was, in business. 'My daughter in business, running a tea-house.' You can imagine just how Father felt, and yet women have gone further than that. They have actually in Pennsylvania last Tuesday, the 2d of November, almost convinced the men of Pennsylvania that they ought to have the vote. (Applause.) That they ought to be politically as well as socially and economically equal with men, and the girl who used to be satisfied to go to a finishing school with her fashions, and her mind finished off alike for the rest of her days, is now discontented unless she gets out and earns \$50 or \$60 or \$100 a month and feels just as her brother feels, that she is not quite grown up unless she can contribute something to her self-support. That is the thing that has come about in twenty-five years, almost. Just in the last generation we have had complete revolution in the status of woman, and the women themselves have asserted their rights to individuality and independence. And you cannot imagine anything more complete than the subordination and the subjection of woman a hundred years ago, and you cannot imagine anything much less complete than it is today. (Laughter.)

"So, as I say, there is hope because even 'the most potent cake of custom,' to use Bagehot's phrase, can be broken. That is one of the most potent forces that has molded public opinion.

## ECONOMIC INTEREST

"Another factor is what we call economic interest. For example, Mr. Rockefeller has just been out in Colorado playing hide-and-seek in the mines. You have read what he did there, the fact that he used common soap and a tin basin, and ate in the camp with the miners. Mr. Rockefeller went out there — they never had been allowed to have a union out there — and handed them a union, a ready-made union, very much as if King George came here about 1774 or 1775, and handed us a ready-made government. Mr. Rockefeller said, 'We will have a vote on this union. Will you accept or will you not accept the Rockefeller Union?' And the newspapers tells us that the miners recorded themselves, several thousand to several hundred, in favor of the Rockefeller Union. Now if you had been a Colorado Fuel & Iron Company miner, and your big boss had come out there and said, 'Do you favor the union I propose?' Would you have risen in your seat and

thrown up your head and cried, 'Aye, aye,' or sat dumb and ground your teeth and said, 'Not on your life?' Suppose your job depended on it, which way would you jump? You would have jumped into the Rockefeller Union, and the wonder is not that anybody voted for it, but that anybody voted against it.

"A gentleman who recently came from England was telling me of an experience he had in the north of the country. He got into a country gentleman's house, and found three clergymen, and they began to talk. It came out in the course of the conversation that this gentleman who was telling the story not only knew Lloyd George, but agreed with his economic point of view, and was in favor of land taxation. Two of the three clergymen stopped the conversation at once. The third carried it out to a frazzled end. Two of the three clergymen walked out without the courtesy of a good-by, and the third said a chilly farewell. Those clergymen got their living from the landlords of England. The landlords of England did not want land taxation. If you had been a clergyman living off of a landlord, who did not want land taxation, would you have applauded the name of Lloyd George? Economic interest, you see.

"As the New Republic commented editorially recently, in discussing the college professor's attitude, it said editorially that most college professors were extremely conservative in their attitude. 'We do not question their integrity,' said the editorial, 'but how fortunate for them that they believe as they do.'

#### PERSONAL CHARACTER COUNTS

"The character of the man himself, the thing that he stands for also counts. For example, take President Wilson's recent attitude on the war with Germany. President Wilson happened to be in a position of peculiar influence, and because he was a man of character, and because he had convictions and stood by them, he staved off war. Now everybody is not in his position. But every man that has ideals and the courage to stand up for them can create public opinion. It may be the public opinion of his own family, it may be the public opinion of the crowd he is working with in his office, it may be the public opinion of a town or city or State or nation, but every man who has courage and ideals, and will stand for his ideals can make public opinion. In other words, it depends on our will and our character as well as the other forces that I have described."

Professor Nearing then gave concrete examples from recent economic and social history in the United States, showing how glaringly some of the fundamentals of American democracy were set at naught by corporations, which denied liberty to their employees, which taxed consumers inordinately, and which fought efforts to raise standards of wage and living.

In closing, he said:

"There is just one other thing that I want to say, and that is that as far as we can see, and we cannot see very far, any of us, there is about one thing that we can do, there is about one appeal that we have, there is about one channel open to us, and that is the channel of intelligent public opinion; not efficiency, but intelligence, being the basis of democracy. We are engaged at the present time in spreading vocational education in the schools. If the vocational education teaches people to accept calmly and without protest things as they are. then that vocational education has taken us just so much further from a true democratic organization of society. (Applause.)

"We cannot depend upon efficiency. We must have intelligence in our democracy. The only avenue for that intelligence is the school. We cannot depend on the press, we cannot depend on the magazines, we cannot depend on churches, we cannot depend on city clubs, we cannot depend on public policies, we cannot depend on any of those avenues for molding public opinion because they are not ours. They belong to a private group, they belong to a private institution, they are susceptible of bias. And there is only one public institution that we have, and that is the public school, that is paid for by public money, a public school that must be kept our public school. (Prolonged applause.)

"There must be no chain of private control of the public-school system. It must be a public institution, and that means that it must be supported by the money of the taxpayers, not the money of one taxpayer or two taxpayers, but of the taxpayers; and if any endowments are to be made, they should be made for taking care of boys and girls, or for providing splendid monuments in the cemetery after the endower is gone, but not for the upkeep of our public schools. It is better to hold a public school in a barn owned by public money than in a palace built by one of the great foundations of private money.

"The schools must be kept public, the schools must be manned by efficient teachers. There was a paper in one of the leading magazines last spring called 'The Third Sex, Men, Women, and Teachers.' And the author went on to say how the ordinary teacher in our public schools was not only not inspired, — not only did you fail to go to the teacher and kindle soul on soul, as Carlyle put it, but the teacher was a coward, hiding behind this or that excuse for his failure to take a part in the leadership of his own community. The author went on to point out that the school-teacher, who ought to be able to lead, the school-teacher who ought to have the virility and courage and energy to lead, was afraid in most cases to go out and express himself fearlessly in the crowd that paid his salary, because of some political influence or bias. And the author concluded that the teaching profession after all was a third sex, without anything very vital or virile in its

veins.

"You have got to have virile teachers, and then you have got to have a school system that is built on this principle, first, the service of the child; second, the service of the community. There have been too many school systems built and run in order to maintain school systems, too many school systems built up by people who like to see the wheels go around, too little attention being paid to the interest of the child, too little attention being paid to the needs of the community. One of the greatest school systems in the country is at Cincinnati, originally built up by Mr. Dyer, who is now superintendent of schools in Boston. (Applause.)

"When I went to Cincinnati three or four years ago to look up the Cincinnati school system I found that Mr. Dyer put up to his local principals this proposition: He said, 'Brooks, there is your school. You are to take charge of it. You must go into that school and' — he did not say, study the curriculum, — 'study your community and fit the course of study to the needs of the people there.' And so, in Cincinnati they had one school where manual training began in the second grade, because those children, most of them, went into the factory at twelve or thirteen, and in another school they had manual training begin in the sixth grade. They fitted the schools to the community, and the teachers were told by the principal the same thing, 'Adapt your work to the needs of the children in your classes. Make the school serve the child, make the school serve the community.' And that means that not only shall the children go to school in the daytime, but at night the families in the vicinity shall spend their evenings, their leisure time, and hold their meetings there. That is why you ought to have a library connected with every schoolhouse, a game-room, a gymnasium, an auditorium, and a playground, so that the community affairs, the affairs of the people can be held there free for the public, in the only free institution there, which is the schoolhouse."