
Rights of Democracy Menaced by Duluth Police Officials:

Raid West End Meeting, Although Federal Authorities Acknowledge
That Speeches Were Not Contrary to Federal Statutes:

**Scott Nearing Arrested:
Trials Set for Wednesday Morning on Charges of
Vagrancy Under Safety Commission Ordinance.**

by W.E. Reynolds

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An estimated audience of over 800 people gathered in Woodman Hall Monday evening, Nov. 12 [1917] to listen to an address by Scott Nearing, the Executive Chairman of the People's Council. Several selections were admirably rendered by the band while awaiting the crowd to gather. The meeting was in no sense a secret meeting as over 500 cards were mailed to various interested parties informing them of the intended visit and lecture of the noted scholar. An advertisement was carried in last week's issue of *Truth*. The only element of secrecy there was to the whole affair was the failure on the part of the committee to notify the daily plute press, who have in thinly veiled editorial utterances seemed to advocate mob rule.

The newspaper reports published to the effect that admission to the meeting was by secret admission cards only were untrue, as the gathering was open to everyone with absolutely no restrictions.

The editor of this paper [W.E. Reynolds] was asked to say a few words and did so, speaking for about 5 minutes, making no mention of the war, the gist of the remarks being that in an autocracy the orders came from the top and sifted downward to the people and in a democracy the orders were given at the bottom by the people and those at the top had to obey and the way to take the mock out of Democracy was to allow the common people to express their views and give their orders.

Professor Nearing was then introduced and had spoken for about a half an hour, mostly quoting statistics about labor conditions and reading from President Wilson's book, *The New Freedom*, when a crowd of perhaps 40 policemen headed by Police Captain Fiskett with Chief McKercher bringing up the rear, as all good generals do, filed in single column down the aisle and dramatically ordered Nearing to stop talking and the audience to disperse. Nearing stopped immediately and the audience filed out of the hall. Joel Lichten, fearing disorder and a possible riot, rose to his feet and said, "Wait, let's have some music while the people are going out." Fiskett says, "You shut up," then grabbed him and yanked him off the platform and placed him under arrest. Later ye ed [Reynolds] was arrested by Lieutenant Hunter, who informed his superiors that "here was one of the speakers." Mrs. [Laura] Reynolds and Marie Baxter were also arrested. Nearing was also placed under arrest and all were taken to the station.

At the station Scott Nearing, W.E. Reynolds, and Mrs. Reynolds were booked, Captain Fiskett first giving sedition as the charge, then he changed it to "making seditious speeches against the government in its conduct of the war." Then he again changed his mind and ordered the charge left blank. Lichten was charge with vagrancy.

Next day the authorities learned there was no

chance to hook a federal charge upon Nearing or any of the rest.

Chief McKercher stated that he did not know why the arrests were made, and it appeared that there was considerable misunderstanding on the part of the police authorities. Commissioner Silberstein was also unable to give any information.

No Federal Laws Violated.

Representatives of the federal Department of Justice were in attendance at the meeting, and John Kenny, attorney for the Department, stated that no federal laws had been violated, and that the raid was made without federal sanction.

The local authorities are reported to have spent the most of the day in conference with federal authorities and in long distance telephoning. A compromise was offered Nearing. He plead guilty to disorderly conduct and paid a fine of \$52.50 and left the city, cancelled his speaking tour, and returned to New York City.

Joel Lichten is reported to have been offered his release if he would plead guilty to disorderly conduct and pay a fine of \$1.00 and \$2.00 costs. He refused to compromise.

Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds and Miss Baxter were charged with vagrancy under the celebrated new Vagrancy Act fostered by the Safety Commission. All pled not guilty and are out on \$100 cash bail. The trial comes up in municipal court, Wednesday morning at 10 o'clock, Nov. 21st [1917].

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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