

What Is Communism?

10. A Glimpse at Soviet America

EARL BROWDER

SCORES of questions have been put to us asking, in one form or another, what a Soviet America would look like. There is a great temptation to answer with an imaginative picture of the glories of an America released from capitalist sabotage. But the imagination is staggered by the first approach to this task. And, after all, of more value is the sober examination of those objective facts of the already achieved productive forces, to see what can be done even without going a step farther than the technical achievements of capitalism.

To what extent can we take the experience of the Soviet Union as a forecast of what a Soviet America would look like?

In certain respects it gives us an accurate forecast; in other respects the question in America will be placed quite differently. The principles upon which a Soviet America would be organized would be the same, in every respect, as those which have guided the Soviet Union. But in our case, these principles would be applied, not to the most backward but to the most advanced capitalist country. This makes for tremendous differences in the physiognomy of the new society.

In Russia the actual seizure of power and establishment of the Soviet Government was relatively easy and almost bloodless; only afterward came the imperialist intervention, prolonged civil war and capitalist-inspired wrecking which, added to the ruin the World War inflicted upon a backward country, left the Soviet Government with the task of building from the ground up in the midst of a hostile world.

In America most of our difficulties lie precisely in the achievement of power for the working class, in the establishment of the Soviet Government; after that has been accomplished, the American capitalists will have no great powerful allies from abroad to help them continue the struggle; it will *already* be clear that world capitalism has received its death-blow; and the Soviet Government of America will take over a society already technically prepared for Communism. Where in Russia it was necessary to go through the prolonged period of War Communism, the N.E.P., the First and Second Five Year Plans, in America we will *start* economically at a stage even further advanced, at about the point which Russia will reach in her Fourth Five Year Plan.

The only thing that could change this basic perspective for America would be a possible, but unpredictable, destruction of American economy by an imperialist war, carried out by agencies of destruction hitherto unknown.

The United States, in short, contains already all the prerequisites for a Communist society except the one single factor of Soviet Power. In Russia, Lenin said, several years after 1917, "The Soviet Power, plus electrification, equals Communism." In America the electrification already exists, so we can shorten Lenin's formula.

The question is, then, given the American working class in undisputed power, what would be the possible and probable course of development of the economic and social life of the country?

The new government would immediately take over and operate all the banks, railroads, water and air transport, mines and all major trustified industries. Minor industries, municipal public utilities and the distributive occupations would be reorganized as functions of local government or as cooperatives or, in some instances, as auxiliaries of major industries. Large-scale agriculture would be taken over and operated by the government, while the mass of small farms would be encouraged to combine into voluntary cooperatives for large-scale production with State aid.

All available man-power would be put to work immediately, first of all in the direct production of material wealth, second in its distribution and third in the social services of health, education and entertainment.

Every able-bodied person would be required to go to work and for this receive wages according to a scale socially determined. Such a wage-scale might range, for example, from a minimum of \$2,000 per year up to \$10,000 or higher, at present values. The average, according to the most conservative estimates of present capacity, after making allowance for capital accumulation, would be about \$5,000 per year for each family in the United States. That can be taken as the immediate minimum standard of living under a Soviet Government in America.

In what form would this be made available to the population? Many questions have been raised, asking whether there would not be such regimentation, such monotonous uniformity, even with such high standards measured in volume, as to take the salt out of life. Such doubters visualize the citizens of Soviet America living in uniform barracks, wearing uniform clothing prescribed by law, eating the same meals, reading the same books and newspapers, seeing the same entertainments, thinking the same thoughts, etc., etc. That picture of Communist society is the bogey-man created by the propagandists for capitalism, but the closest that humanity will ever get to such a stage is the present

moment under capitalism. These gentlemen would have us believe that Communism will merely take the worst features of capitalism and make it the universal rule. Why we should do such stupid things, no one can explain.

The fact is, of course, that the Communist reality would be quite different from this doleful picture. For the first time we could escape from the terrible housing imposed by capitalism and begin to get modern, decent homes for everybody. Even the first simple redistribution of existing housing would revolutionize this situation. We could smash the uniformity of clothing imposed by the combination of our own poverty and capitalist mass production. For the first time in our lives the majority could eat what their tastes dictate, because for the first time they could afford it. And for the first time, the human mind would be liberated from the slavery to Hollywood, Hearst & Co.

Why can we be sure that we would have all these desirable things? Because there would be nothing to prevent us from having them if we want them. We would have the power to form our lives the way we choose; we have every reason, therefore, to expect that the choice will not be the stupid, reactionary nonsense described by the enemies of Communism.

The primary concern of the Soviet Government will be *production*; this will be highly centralized, to realize the benefits of the highest technical achievements. All means of production will be socialized, taken out of private control. But *consumption* will be socialized only upon a voluntary basis, with the greatest flexibility and freedom of choice for each individual. And the greater grows the flow of *production* of wealth, the more complete will become the *freedom of consumption*, up to the point where all consumption will become absolutely free and unfettered.

ONLY under such a society can we expect to witness the full unfolding of the marvelous potentialities of the human spirit, the development of human genius and individuality raised to the *n*th power because it is the power no longer of a few exceptional individuals but of the million masses of free men and women.

Many of our questioners have asked: "But how can the industries be kept operating at capacity without the profit motive? Will not a bureaucratic apparatus grow up in control which will become a new ruling class? And do we not have again the seeds of the old profit motive in the unequal wages, etc.,

which even you admit will exist under socialism?"

We expect our socialist factories to produce at top speed, precisely because the "profit motive" has been eliminated. That famous old profit motive, which used to open up factories in the youth of capitalism, operates in modern times mainly to close them down. The administrative apparatus of a socialist economy can never become a new ruling class, because it lacks precisely that *private ownership*, that monopoly of the means of life of the masses, which is the foundation of class divisions in society.

No, the old profit motive is not creeping back into the socialist society through the unequal wages, etc. The profit motive has nothing to do with wages, equal or unequal, notwithstanding Mr. Roosevelt's efforts in his message to Congress last January, to picture the whole population of the country as living on profits and depending upon increased profits for an increased standard of living. Such a conception of profits belongs not to the literature of economics, but that of the bedtime stories for children. Profit is only that appropriation from the current production of society which is based upon and justified by, the *private ownership* of the socially-used means of production. The profit-motive is never anything else than that motive of the *owners*, as owners, to allow their property to be used for production in the expectation of realizing an increasing proportion of the product as profit. The motive of those who do the producing never was, is not and can never be, a "profit-motive" but exists only in spite of profit and in constant antagonism to it. The removal of profit under socialism releases the basic human motives to labor from their greatest handicap.

What are the human motives to labor? The most primitive and almost the only ones under capitalism are the fear of hunger and want, the desire to escape starvation. Under capitalism, the highest development of this motive is the ambition to rise, by hard labor, out of the laboring class into the petty-bourgeoisie. Under socialism, this most primitive motive will be applied mainly in the re-making of bourgeois elements into workers. For the main mass of workers, socialism introduces new motives, social motives, the motives of social emulation, the honor and heroism of producers serving society and not private profit-takers.

Under socialism, labor becomes more and more of a privilege instead of a burden; it carries with it its own rewards, of which the material aspect becomes less and less important, the aspect of social recognition becomes more and more dominant.

And what a gigantic motive-power for society is this new motive of socialist labor! What an expansion of the human powers is brought about by it! Already the Soviet Union has given us a few glimpses into the profound revolution in human nature that is brought about by the operation of this new motive in human activity.

Socialism is not only a revolution in economic life. It makes an entirely new human race. It takes this man who has been brutalized and degraded through the ages by the violence and oppression of class societies, frees him from this woeful heritage, carries over from the past only the achievements of the human mind and not its crimes and stupidities and remakes man, molding him in the heat of socialist labor into the new social being.

The rising socialist system in the Soviet Union has, for years now, demonstrated that in the expansion of material production it outdistances capitalism in the period of its youth by seven or eight-fold. In the production of superior types of human being, the

superiority of socialism is demonstrated a thousand times more decisively. Capitalism, even in decay, can still produce material wealth, even though the amount becomes smaller; but in the production of the higher types of men and the raising of the social level of the population as a whole, the capitalist system has completely lost what power it had in its youth; today it is corrupting and degrading whole populations and poisons and stultifies its own geniuses.

Today it has become clear that all human progress is possible only in struggle against the capitalist system and its agents, only in the fight for socialism as the next stage in the historical march toward the classless, Communist society.

Letters from Readers

EARL BROWDER

Religion Minus the Supernatural

Earl Browder,
c/o NEW MASSES:

I assume that there are people who feel at home only in a Communist world except that they still find some attraction in elements of their particular religious background. They may be considered potential Communists, who derive a great deal of aesthetic, intellectual and social satisfaction out of the religious tradition into which they were born. These people experience an inner conflict between their Communist and religious tendencies. I suppose that the Communist sees this conflict as inevitable but temporary, trusting and working for the victory of the Communist tendency and the defeat of what he considers its opposite.

Your article on "Communism and Religion" was not intended to help the person who finds himself in the throes of this struggle. This may be due in part to your faith in the ultimate outcome of the conflict but it does not fulfill the second half of the commandment which enjoins working for it. Since this failure, therefore, is probably not the reason, I am led to suspect that it may be because you have not received any questions on this aspect of the problem. It is my intention, with your permission, to supply this want.

Accepting the evolutionary, rather than the static-revelatory view of religion, might we not say that religion has been developing away from superstition? Is not our identification of religion (e. g. as "legitimate magic") with superstition due to our judgment of the past by our modern standards? Does not the antagonism of religion toward magic show that religion was consistently freeing itself from what we were gradually learning to identify as superstition? (Is not the distinction between the natural and the supernatural rather modern? Is not the belief in the supernatural, in idols, devils and gods, in the past due rather to the ignorance of the times than to the nature of religion?) Do not the consistent development of the passion for righteousness and the consistent elimination of superstition prove that religion is by its very nature (though not in its perversions) a force for light rather than darkness? Is it not therefore incorrect to identify religion with superstition?

Accepting the probability of religion becoming free from superstition (as is already true, permit me to think, in the case of some individuals; and as science is said to have become), might one not say that the maxims of "the inevitability of historical processes" and "the freedom of human will," basic to Communism, partake in one form or another of the larger part of religion? (I am not trying to be "smart alecky" in implying that Communism partakes of the quality of religion.) Let us eliminate

superstition and the dichotomy between things seen and unseen (natural and supernatural are merely misinterpretations of these two classes of experience). Would not the Communistic "materialism" and religious "divinity" be merely the respective propagandists' tools, manufactured out of the intellectual ore of the above-mentioned two maxims? (This without going into the question as to who did the better job.) Is not therefore the antagonism between the two due (certainly only in part, but at least) to some extent to their fundamental similarity and to the desire to monopolize the loyalty of their adherents (spirit of competition)?

Is not the largest portion of Communist antagonism to religion due to the reactionary attitude on social questions held by the religious hierarchies, especially of the Old World, which had a firm grip on the thoughts and actions of the masses? Is not therefore the Communist opposed to this use of religion rather than to religion itself? Should not Communist opposition to religion be termed opposition to institutionalized religion? Is not the opposition to religion in general, which has developed as a result of opposition to certain specific religions, an unwarranted generalization for all religions and for all time? Is not this generalization backed up by rationalizations which interpret temporary characteristics as permanent ones? Is not this confusion as to the character of religion, the cause of Communist opposition toward institutionalized religion being greater than toward institutionalized education, science, government, etc.? Is it not further true that Communism has not made similar generalizations in the case of the latter activities? Is this due to the above-mentioned desire for undivided loyalty? Is all this opposition temporary rather than fundamental?

Might not the tendency toward united fronts with religious institutions be due to something more than applying the method of boring from within? Might it not be due in some measure to a feeling which senses the weakness of the above-mentioned generalization and which sees in the acceptance of two loyalties not the weakness of divided allegiance but personal enrichment through double responsibilities? Might it also not be due to the recognition of the fact that the fundamentals of religion are more effective when taught in terms of the folk-ways which have become dear to members of a certain social group?

Finally, would Communism be opposed to the perpetration and further development of a religious tradition which continued to eliminate superstition and which preached and taught in terms of a cooperative society? Does Communism oppose the development of a religious tradition because it is an unnecessary or even harmful popularization of phi-

losophy and aesthetics? What would be the Communist attitude toward a development of Judaism along the lines of M. M. Kaplan's "Judaism as a Civilization" or of Christianity along the lines of "Moral Man and Immoral Society"? Is the Communist disinclination to sharing loyalties due to a distrust in everybody else's sincerity?

I don't know whether these questions are worth your time or whether their answers would be in place in a magazine. In any case, here they are and, if possible, please let me know your answers to at least some of them.

New York City.

A. S. H.

Religion Based on Supernatural

Earl Browder,
c/o NEW MASSES:

I read your article entitled "Communism and Religion" in the last issue of NEW MASSES. It is a foolish article. You say you welcome constructive criticism. Well, here I am.

Communists have been guilty of many grave "mistakes." I say stubborn stupidities. And the worst thing, they are slow to learn. I have no quarrel with Communism. I must criticize Communists.

I am not dealing with Czarist Russia and its church problems. I am dealing with America and her religious world, which is entirely different from old Russia.

Here in America the state and church are separated. Freedom of atheism is recognized by law equally with freedom of any and all religions. Here religion is the personal right of the individual to freedom of thought and expression. No true Communist can oppose this freedom. In fact a true Communist who understands true Communism must support it.

Communism is as old as humanity, almost; and before Marx and Lenin lived and wrote, and they happened to be atheists, Communist groups were quite often religious groups. You can't get away from this fact.

You have sixty million people in America organized in religious groups in the most powerful influential bodies of America. Many of these people are radical in their economic views and many ready to support economic Communism.

What is the sense of constantly insulting and irritating them in your tactical ignorance and boorishness?

You prattle of your desire of a broad, united mass front and yet do everything to make impossible a united front. What insanity obsesses you people? Or is it abject slavery on your part to higher powers that be steeped in ignorance and stupidity?

After all, what do you know about the force behind life and the universe? Or any other individual? And what do you know about yourself and particularly about your future after your so-called death? You know nothing. And knowing nothing it is ignorance and impudence on your part to become arrogant and dogmatic about things you are ignorant of.

I know more than you do and more than did Lenin and Marx in this particular matter, for I know that I am a spiritual being that will survive and retain personal consciousness after I leave this carnal body which will either rot or be burned up for all I care. Knowing this I speak to you as your MASTER, whether you recognize me or not. I say to you humble yourself, you ignorant fool. I say this to your leaders in Russia also, whose economic experiments I wish to see prosper. I also wish to see a higher development of character and respect for truth in Russia without which your experiment will fail.

We here in America are divided into two bodies, believers and honest disbelievers. We all alike have to live, to feed and clothe and shelter our bodies, and can and should unite economically and politically to achieve this in the fullest and quickest way. A sound economic and political platform can unite all of us regardless of belief and non-belief, provided we keep religious controversy out. If we are crazy enough to inject religious argument, we immediately divide up our forces to the joy of the

sons of the devil. Are you instruments of the devil made stubborn and stupid to prevent humanity's unification on its common needs? It looks that way to me, no matter how many large jaw-breaking words you use to confuse the people, who should be made to understand in the simplest way the things that concern them.

If you fellows are stubborn in your ignorant atheism and denial of all spiritual life, why bless your undeveloped and blind souls, you will all wake up sometime and recognize with grief your brazen ignorance. Go ahead and form a separate atheist society and fight religion upon the intellectual arena, separate and apart from the political and economic arena and from the Communist Party advocacies.

In other words, you must divorce atheism from Communism completely and make Communism a purely economic and political proposition, and nothing else, and keep religion and anti-religion out of Communism, as is historically Communism's right. Robert Ingersoll fought religion on the educational forum and not on the political forum. So must your atheists. Unless you do so, I predict failure and suffering for you in America.

When will Communists gain wisdom and understanding and a desire for truth? You dare not publish this letter which all Communists need to read. Why don't you open up your press to honest discussion of issues?

Phoenix, Ariz.

DANIEL SPEERS.

P.S.—You are at liberty to publish this letter in your press.

Comment: These two letters, different as they are, one being "arrogant and dogmatic" while the other is persuasive and logically argumentative, are yet as one in their common insistence that Com-

munism, as an economic and political program, is not or must not be antagonistic to religion.

We print the two letters as concrete evidence of the nature of the problems dealt with in the article under criticism. To answer all the questions raised would, at this time, exceed our available space. To the first correspondent, however, we can answer briefly, that we consider supernaturalism the essence of religion and it is very difficult for us to conceive of a religion purged of this most characteristic element. Surely, such an attenuated ghost of a religion would not be such a vicious enemy of human progress as the Roman-Catholic hierarchy and perhaps would be innocuous, admitting that it could exist at all. But after all, the effective religion is not the imagining of our correspondent, but the organization of popular superstitions by the ruling class for the purpose of controlling the masses; and this is further the objective role of even the most attenuated form of religion in the idealistic philosophies. Therefore, all dreams of any fundamental reconciliation between Communism and religion are idle.

To correspondent number two, we can only again give our assurance that we really do stand for religious freedom. As he recognizes, this includes the freedom to be anti-religious. But his recognition is immediately withdrawn when he says that our irreligion will "make impossible a united front." And experience proves he is wrong. In fact, many church groups which never had joint activity in their long history, are today being brought together for social purposes through the instrumentality of the atheistic Communists. Their mutual antagonisms as rival creeds and sects are greater than their antagonism to the Communists, who have the virtue of being absolutely neutral as to the merits of their respective claims. In short, despite his vehemence, we think the gentleman is wrong.

Bread Winners

DAVID GREENHOOD

The sheriff home, his bloodhounds fed,
Thwacks his hands and cracks his bread
—Some skin is black, all blood is red—
He soaks his corns and goes to bed.

The judge is home, the sentence said.
With crabbed hands he cuts his bread
—Some skin is white, all blood is red—
He scrubs his teeth and goes to bed.

The hangman home with hanging head
Has defter thumbs to butter bread
—Some skin is black, all blood is red—
He doffs his truss and goes to bed.

Beholders at the gallows-shed
Come home with clammy hands for bread
—Some skin is white, all blood is red—
They scan their tongues and go to bed.

The undertaker's bathed the dead
With fingers washed he breaks his bread
—Some skin is black, all blood is red—
He blows his nose and goes to bed.