

What Is Communism?

3. Who Will Lead the Revolution?

EARL BROWDER

MANY readers of *THE NEW MASSES* find it difficult to understand the nature of a class in society, the role of the different classes, their relations to one another and to the problem of building a new socialist society. We take a typical expression of these questions. A sympathetic engineer writes:

I agree to a great extent with your criticism of the present system and with your ideas about what a socialist society would be like. But I can't agree with your idealization of the workers, nor with your dogmatic insistence upon forcing ignorant working-class leadership upon the intelligent, skilled, trained middle class. The only possibility of achieving the new society, in my opinion, is under the leadership of the engineers and technicians. What possible reasonable arguments can you advance for your position and against the leadership of the most skilled and intelligent part of the population?

The answers to these questions involve the whole problem of the class structure of society. Our questioner will not be able to understand the Communist position so long as he keeps closely before his eyes, obscuring all larger questions, the individual technician and his capacities in his own field, in comparison with the individual worker and his general lack of technical training outside of his specialized job. It is necessary to see *the classes as a whole* and their function in society in order to be able later to judge *the individual in relation to his class*.

What is this class structure of society?

The most important class in America from the point of view of power is the capitalist class. This comprises all those who function through ownership of means of production which are operated by wage labor. Within this class, however, all real power rests in the hands of a very small nucleus of the largest capitalists (monopoly or financial capitalists) who through their gigantic personal fortunes and through the pyramiding of corporation control by interlocking directorates, etc., effectively hold a mastery over 80 to 90 percent of all the means of production. The essential mastery of the country rests in the hands of somewhere between five hundred and six hundred of the richest families in the country.

At the other end of the social scale is the working class. This comprises all those who depend for their daily livelihood upon working for wages, usually by the day or by the week. The working class is the largest single group in the population in every industrial country, and in the United States constitutes an absolute majority. As distinct from the capitalist class it owns no property of any kind, aside from meager collections of house-

hold goods and in some exceptional cases, the ownership of homes.

This general characterization is not in any appreciable degree modified by the existence of the pre-crisis practice of corporations forcing their employes to purchase stock on the installment plan or by savings accounts, insurance, etc. All these forms of property holding among the working class will not in their aggregate mean more than the accumulation of a few weeks' wages for the working class as a whole. Most of such savings that existed before the crisis have been swallowed up since 1929 by unemployment. For all practical purposes the working class is propertyless. That is the meaning of the scientific term "proletariat," the class of propertyless wage workers.

Like the capitalist class, certain sections of the working class occupy a more strategic position than others in relation to the economic system and to the class struggle. These more important groups within the working class are the workers in basic industry and in large scale mass production, such as steel and iron, coal, automobiles, heavy machine manufacturing, etc. We will discuss later the characteristics of these groups arising out of their position in the productive process that gives them an especially important role.

In between these two basic classes, the small capitalist ruling class at the top owning most of the productive forces of the country, and the propertyless wage workers at the bottom, there are a series of intermediate groups known collectively in popular language as the middle class—although it is not a homogeneous class but rather a series of class groups covering a wide range in economic status and function. In its upper layers the middle class merges with the capitalists; its lower ranks are constantly being thrown into the working class.

The most important and numerically largest group are the farmers. The farmers, taken as a whole, cannot be considered a homogeneous class such as the working class. They are subdivided into at least three main strata. First, there are the rich and well-to-do farmers, the upper circles of which merge directly with the capitalist class, being essentially operating capitalists working entirely with the labor of wage workers upon a highly mechanized basis, with the type of farming that could be called agrarian factory production. The lower limits of this group of rich farmers are reached with those who still work their own farms, but with hired labor performing the major part of the work. This entire stratum of farmers is essentially capitalistic in its whole make-up and outlook.

It is bound by a thousand ties with the existing system and with monopoly capital. As a whole it can never operate independently but only as an auxiliary to the big capitalists.

The middle stratum of farmers comprises all the independent producers below the rich farmer class who, operating mainly through their own labor and that of their families, are still able to maintain their farms and a certain minimum standard of economic and social life.

At the bottom of the farming population are the poor farmers, comprising the largest part of the tenant and mortgaged farmers, practically the entire body of share-croppers, and, especially in the last years, including a large section of the former middle farmers who have been impoverished by the crisis.

As the interests of the rich farmers determine their allegiance to capitalism, so the interests of the poor farmers propels them in the opposite direction, against the capitalists and towards alliance with the working class. The middle farmers vacillate between these two basic class forces. At certain times and on certain issues they go with the rich farmers and the capitalists. At other times with the poor farmers and the workers.

THE city middle classes are composed of a kaleidoscopic maze of shopkeepers, lawyers, doctors, preachers, writers, journalists, hired executives, office functionaries, artists, teachers, technicians, engineers etc. Their economic status ranges all the way from that of the high-paid technician and the doctors who attend the neurotic wives of the rich, down to the status of the lowest ranks of the so-called "free" professions, which is even lower economically than that of the employed semi-skilled worker.

The outstanding characteristic of the city middle class as a whole is its heterogeneity. Its groups have no common social or economic function, or common economic status. It lacks any basis for the building of middle class solidarity, common policies or common action.

Examining this set-up of class groupings with their varying characteristics, it should not be difficult very quickly to estimate the position of each toward the main questions of the class struggle, toward the proposal of abolishing the capitalist system and setting up a socialist society. It is clear that the capitalists as a whole, with those sections of the middle class most closely allied to it and with the greatest stake in the existing system, will fight to the death against a new system which would deprive them of all their special privileges. It is equally clear that the work-

ers, and first of all the workers in basic and large-scale industry, have the least to lose in the present system and the most to gain from a socialist society. The lower middle classes, more susceptible to capitalist influence than the workers, are yet on the whole more and more driven to align themselves with the workers in the fight against monopoly capital which is continually driving down their standards of life. Large sections of the middle classes inevitably are unable to follow any clear and consistent course but must hesitate and vacillate between the two main class forces.

How utopian it is, therefore, to expect leadership from any of these middle class groupings in the struggle for a socialist society. Let us examine in more detail, for example, that group nominated for the leading post by our correspondent whom we quoted above, namely, the engineers and technicians. The idea of the engineer as the leader of the movement for a new society was first clearly formulated by Thorstein Veblen, before the World War. But even at that time, Thorstein Veblen himself realized the impossibility of expecting the engineers as a group to play such a role and the impossibility of their independent functioning. His projected "Soviet of Engineers" as he put it after the 1917 Revolution in Russia, was a combination of the most advanced technicians with the main body of the working class. Unrealistic as Veblen's dream was, he should by no means be saddled with responsibility for the recurrent vulgarization of his suggestions that are propagated by the technocrats and which have undoubtedly influenced our questioner as well as considerable sections of the middle class.

The engineers and technicians are themselves a most heterogeneous group. Before the crisis a considerable and dominating number were well-paid and satisfied servants of capitalism, while the lower ranks were filled with ambitions and hopes of climbing into the more favored positions. Since 1929 the overwhelming majority of them have been discarded by capitalism as useless forces. Most of them are impoverished and a not inconsiderable number are on the breadlines. Others have become taxi-drivers, doormen at night clubs and hotels, waiters, etc., displacing former workers in these positions and throwing them into the ranks of the unemployed. The largest part of them are subsisting on relief or working in the apparatus of relief administration or on "made" work of the P.W.A., etc. So far from witnessing any tendency among the most politically advanced and most impoverished of these technicians to come forward in any independent role, we see among them on the contrary the growing recognition that their only future lies in identifying themselves with the working class, subordinating themselves to the working class as the main class force fighting for the new society. The only bid for "independence" of the engineers and technicians is the travesty of "technocracy," which points clearly and

unmistakably in the direction of fascism, that is, independence only in name, and in fact complete subservience to the most reactionary section of the capitalist class.

It should be clear to anyone who has followed our analysis of the various classes and their characteristics, and who cannot set up and defend any basically different analysis of the classes, that the statement of our questioner that we are guilty of "dogmatic insistence" upon forcing working class leadership upon the intelligent, skilled, trained middle class is an entirely false statement of the problem. The insistence upon working class leadership in the struggle for socialism does not arise out of any dogma, is not the result of some scheme hatched in the minds of Communist dreamers. On the contrary, it is a necessity which arises out of the very nature of present class society. It is a necessity not merely for the workers, but for all of those who want to bring into action the greatest possible forces to achieve Socialism, to escape from the catastrophes being visited upon them by collapsing capitalism. Working class leadership is not some demand put forward by the workers in their own narrow class interests. It is a basic necessity without which socialism cannot be achieved.

THIS brings us to a letter from another reader who poses the question in a different form and from another angle. He writes:

It is becoming clear to me that the working class is the main instrument through which socialism will be achieved. But why do you exclude from any significant part in this great historical change all of us middle-class professionals, and condemn us to the role of camp-followers and water-carriers for the working class? Why do you deny the value and significance of individuals from other classes?

This reader, while grasping the basic idea of the role of the working class, has misunderstood the Communist position and interprets it in a narrow, distorted manner. We do not assign to the working class a monopoly of the revolutionary process of carrying through this great social transformation. Our theory of the role of the working class is not that of *monopoly* but of *hegemony* in the revolution. These are two distinct and different conceptions. The idea of hegemony presupposes not the exclusion of other class

groupings from the revolution but on the contrary necessitates the active participation of all the exploited and impoverished masses, together with and *under the leadership* of the working class. The first and most important elaboration of the theory of hegemony is the policy of alliance between the working class and the main body of the farmers against capitalism and for the new society. It also presupposes that individuals and groups from all other classes who are able to rise above their narrow class interests and understand the whole historic process, will break with their class, join the revolutionary working class as allies, and even identify themselves and merge with the working class. This will be true even of individuals and groups from among the higher circles of the ruling class. This is not a new idea in the Communist movement. It was first enunciated in 1847 by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the famous *Communist Manifesto* from which dates the whole history of scientific socialism.

From all this it follows that the Communists do not deny the *value and significance of individuals from other classes*. On the contrary we estimate these very highly. It is true that we do not fall upon the neck of every individual who comes to us from the enemy classes and immediately hand over the leadership of the movement to him. In fact, we are very suspicious of most of these people, because we have found through long experience that the largest part of them come, not through basic understanding, but through temporary and unstable moods and sentimental ideas. Such people have no value or significance, beyond the moment, for the revolutionary movement. What momentary value they may have is usually more than offset by the confusions and dangers which they bring with them. But those individuals who come to the revolutionary movement with the basic understanding of the historic necessity of abolishing capitalism, who are ready to subordinate themselves to, and identify themselves with, the only completely revolutionary class, are able to make serious and lasting contributions to the cause of socialism. In fact, scientific socialism was founded by two such people, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

Earl Browder's fourth article, next week, will deal with "Wages, Unemployment Insurance and Revolution."—THE EDITORS.

Questions from Readers

ANSWERED BY EARL BROWDER

A Classless Society

Question: Is it true that John Strachey said the Communists believe in classes? Is the classless state the ultimate aim of Communism?

Answer: Without having heard every word Strachey spoke, or read each of his written words, I can still, from my knowledge of his political mind, deny completely that he ever said anything that the question implies. Communists do not "believe

in classes"; they believe that classes exist, that the struggle between classes must be fought out to a conclusion, that this conclusion can only be the victory of the working class—which is the victory of socialism. This belief is a scientific conclusion, based upon the evidence of history and the Marxian analysis of the existing social and economic system.

No, the "classless state" is not the aim of the Communists, ultimate or otherwise. "Classless state" is a contradiction in terms. The "State" is the

political organization of society made necessary by the division of society into classes; with the abolition of classes, the State disappears. The ultimate aim of the Communists is to achieve the *classless* and therefore *stateless, society*.

"All Not Born Equal"

Question: That men are not born with equal ability and intelligence is accepted by all. Also, economic inequality is political inequality. How do Communists reconcile these facts with their professed aim of a classless society?

Answer: The form of the question assumes that class division is based upon differences of ability and intelligence among men. The ruling class would like to have us believe this; but such a belief becomes absolutely stupid in these days of the Five-and-Ten Princess Barbara Hutton Mdivani, and the Half-Billion-Dollar-Dollhouse Colleen Moore—not to mention the pages of daily effluvia of the society columns. The class structure of society is designed to *prevent* the superior abilities and intelligence existing among the masses of the exploited from finding their normal expression, development, and resulting influence upon the course of social development. A socialist society will release all these unequal abilities from *class restrictions*, allowing them free development, and providing special opportunities for the specially gifted individuals, entirely upon the basis of merit. The policy of the socialist society would be determined by its fundamental aim to expand its productive forces to the fullest possible extent in the quickest possible time; this means that the most useful and productive individuals would require more scope for their abilities than the less useful and productive. The determination of the relative scale of usefulness and productivity would thus be arrived at in a socially-organized fashion.

Not "Just Another 'ism'"

Question: How can we feel certain that Communism will not turn out to be just another of the "isms" which have come and gone in the long range of human history and which, as a rule, have proven

either worthless or disappointing to the toilers?

Answer: Workers can make themselves certain that Communism is not "just another 'ism'" by learning that Communism does not promise to "bring something to" them, but rather to develop their own power, as an organized class, to win things for themselves. Workers can become even more certain by learning, through experience, that the teachings of Communism enable them to win a better life as the struggle proceeds. They can gain absolute certainty by studying how the Communist Party is now actually building socialism in the Soviet Union, and by understanding the science through which this became possible, the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.

State Socialism

Question: What is State Socialism? Does State Socialism exist today in the Soviet Union?

Answer: What is usually understood by the term "state socialism" is, in actuality, state capitalism. It is state operation of certain industries (in theory it may be state operation of all major industries), without expropriation of the capitalists, in which capitalist ownership has been changed in form to the ownership of government bonds. No, nothing of the kind exists in the Soviet Union. In the only sense that the Soviet Union could be described as "state socialism," in that it is organized and built under the direction of the Workers' Government, such an application of the term is meaningless, because *all* socialism is "state socialism" in that sense. A "stateless" socialism is already Communism.

Freedom of the Press

Question: How can THE NEW MASSES demand a free press in America when in Russia, our only example of Communism, there is no such thing?

Answer: This apparently simple question is, when analyzed, a whole series of questions. First of all, *for whom* are we demanding freedom of the press? For the workers, for the people who perform the labor of society. And what is the situation of the workers in Russia (it is now the *Soviet Union*, by the way, no longer Russia!) regarding freedom of

the press? Why, they have it—a glorious freedom, in which they have multiplied the issue of their press from the few tens of thousands per year of the pre-revolutionary times, to the thirty-seven millions per day of the present! So we see, the moment we ask "freedom for whom?" it becomes clear that we are demanding for American workers a *little bit* of what the Russian workers have gained entirely. So there is no longer any contradiction, at this point. Our questioner may rejoice, then, that in America "free press" is first of all free for the capitalists. We can only reply, that we know that only too well, that this is too bad, that while we do not propose to remedy this at once, we hope to come practically to this problem in due course of time. Our capitalist democracy (more scientifically bourgeois democracy) has justified historically its placing of all power in the hands of a small group of capitalists, by declaring that the masses choose that capitalism shall so rule, by going through democratic forms of obtaining the consent of the masses; in fact, capitalism could never have developed to its present level except by means of this bourgeois democracy. But long ago, just as the individual competing capitalists were replaced by trusts and giant monopolies, so did the boasted freedoms—of the press, speech and assemblage—become more and more curtailed, for the masses. Today, the fight for free press for the workers is seriously, actively, carried on only by those who want to use this freedom to change from capitalism to socialism. It is not THE NEW MASSES, not the Communists, who are open to the charge of hypocrisy, but on the contrary, it is the capitalists (and those who speak for them), who boast of a free press, free speech, free assembly, universal franchise—but only for so long as there is no danger that these things will be used against their class rule. If our questioner has any doubts of this, let him only look at the flood of proposed laws in Washington and all state legislatures (many of them already passed) denying the Communist Party electoral rights, and making crimes punishable by imprisonment up to fourteen years of the most ordinary exercise of those freedoms by anyone who could be suspected of wanting to change the capitalist system.

Washington—Jim-Crow Capital

2. "Friends of the Negro"

MARGUERITE YOUNG

I SPOKE to Eugene Kinckle Jones about the Jim-Crow pattern of Washington. He should know. He is Advisor on Negro Affairs in the Department of Commerce, and was secretary of the influential National Urban League for twenty-five years.

He did know. He said, "It's so obvious to any colored person who comes into Washington that all life is on a Jim-Crow basis, I don't know what to say." Then he went on to explain why he is so acutely aware of this. The first-hand experience of "all life on a Jim-Crow basis" came as a shock to him because during all his previous years as a "leader" of the Negro masses, he had resided in a lily-white neighborhood in New York! Enjoying a certain individual tolerance in recognition of his service in the field of inter-racial cooperation, he had chosen to capitalize it by living in a "white" apart-

ment house. "Not another colored family in a square mile of us," he boasted. Ironically, he has to face the music in a Jim-Crow society personally, now that he is a Roosevelt official living on this federal ground.

He sat in his severely plain office in a deserted corner of the Commerce building. His Negro secretarial staff is segregated in the government dining room. (One personal privilege remains to Jones: at work, *he* eats with the white officialdom.)

There was an air of utter listlessness in this office behind the flagpole. I asked Jones just what his work was. He said, "I can take up any matter relating to Negroes. Any matter that would help to increase the Negro's prestige and power. Of course, my work cuts across other departments' activities, and naturally there is a certain amount of caution taken not to tread on the other fel-

low's toes. But, in all fairness, I think Mr. Roper is for seeing that the Negro gets a fair deal—that is, over against your system." Roper is one of the New Bourbons, a South Carolina lawyer who became Secretary of Commerce after winning his spurs as counsel to those notorious exploiters of Negroes, the American sugar barons in Cuba. I let this pass, however, inquiring rather just what Jones knew about "my" system.

"I mean—the Negro question—I mean that from your point of view, if there's a change in the whole darned system, the Negro would take his chance on getting a square deal *and I have no doubt he would*. But retaining the capitalist system as it is—and I think we will for a long time—Mr. Roper's attitude is to be commended."

"Do you think the Negro can get justice under this system?" I tried to pin him down.