

What Is Communism?

4. Your Wages and Revolution

EARL BROWDER

ONE of our readers has raised a question which, from many directions, in different forms, we have learned to recognize as an old acquaintance. He writes:

Norman Thomas has said and written many times that the danger of fascism and war is made greater, if not caused, by the ideas and activities of the Communists. He says you *provoke* the capitalists to their reactionary deeds. What have you to say in answer to this charge?

What can we say? What would you, reader, say if you were emerging from the hospital with your head bandaged from the results of resisting a hold-up, and were rebuked for having *provoked* your assailant? Or what would you say, being placed in the position of Bob Minor and David Levinson in Gallup, New Mexico, when the government officials, charged with upholding the "public order," accuse you of having kidnaped yourselves? Or suppose you are one of the Gallup miners charged with murder because the murderers of your brothers also shot down the sheriff?

But let us be "coldly objective" about this question. We will hold our indignation for another occasion. We will try to understand fully the point of view that poses such a question, and find out exactly what degree of truth there is in it.

Do the capitalists and their agents take the path of fascism from some inborn predisposition in that direction? No, clearly not. Are they preparing another bloody war from love of slaughter? No, that is too simple an answer. While there are plenty of fascist types and lovers of war, natural products of a rotting capitalism, yet those who rule, those who hold power, those who give or withhold the orders for the fascist troops and militarists, are motivated by policy, coldly-considered policy. Their policy is directed toward a definite goal. That goal is to restore profits, by driving down wages and living standards at home and taking away foreign markets from rival powers.

If our capitalist rulers could recoup their sinking profits at the expense of the masses, by continuing the old traditional "freedoms," civil rights and democratic machinery, of course they would not turn to "new methods," to fascism. What "provokes" them to fascism? Clearly, it is the resistance of the masses to the increased robbery. They cannot continue to rob successfully in the old way.

Here we find the basis of the theory of "provocation" as the cause of fascism. It arises from the viewpoint of the "humane," "liberal" capitalists who would like to carry

on their intensified exploitation in a peaceful, smooth and quiet manner; who are pained and surprised by the resistance of "their" workers; who are "provoked" by this resistance, against their own "good wishes" in the matter, to rally their demagogues, storm troops and underworld gunmen.

Every person who brings forward this argument of "provocation," has adopted, consciously or unconsciously, the viewpoint of the capitalist exploiters.

It is true that the Communist program and activities have one single goal: to organize and make more effective the resistance of the working class and all exploited masses against the capitalist policies of further enriching the rich and more deeply impoverishing the poor. If that is "provocation" of fascism, then make the most of it!

If the workers would not resist, if the capitalists could get the masses to accept their policies so easily and thoroughly as William Green, Matt Woll, John Lewis and Norman Thomas accept them, then the capitalists would find no need for fascism. This argument is, in substance, that we should "defeat" fascism by making it "unnecessary" for the capitalists, by ourselves accomplishing for the capitalists those aims which they otherwise will call upon fascism to reach. It is a kind of scabbing upon the potential storm troops.

So, we find "truth" of a sort in the charge made against the Communists, that we "provoke" our well-intentioned capitalists on to the path of fascism. It is a purely "relative" truth, a class truth, a capitalist truth. It is true, that is, only for those who accept the sacredness of capitalist profits and justify everything necessary to maintain the profit system.

It is equally clear, however, that from the viewpoint of the working class struggle for the right to live, this is the most damnable falsehood. It is only in unrelenting struggle against such "truths" that the working class can free itself from slavery.

It is, by the way, instructive to note how this argument fits into the logical scheme of William Randolph Hearst. That well-known pal of Hitler, Goering and Rosenberg launched his fascist campaign against everything decent in America with a manifesto proclaiming that fascism would come in this country only if we tolerate the Communist movement; in the name of avoiding fascism, he called for the violent destruction of the Communists, the dismissal of every liberal professor from the universities and the muzzling of Norman Thomas himself!

WE COME to the next question from two opposite approaches. One reader reproaches the Communists with endangering the success of the workers' struggles for immediate demands by our revolutionary propaganda; the other thinks we have abandoned the revolution through our energetic struggle for immediate demands, such as the Workers' Unemployment, Old Age and Social Insurance Bill, H. R. 2827.

The first one writes:

Why don't you Communists keep yourselves out of the current strike situations, where you only paint the strikers "Red," rouse the employers and the public against them, and help to defeat the strike?

The second one comes to the same conclusion from opposite premises:

The Communist Party, by its participation in strikes for small reforms and by its advocacy of unemployment insurance, is helping capitalism to avoid revolutionary upheaval. The true revolutionist welcomes the worsening of conditions, because only the whip of starvation will drive the ignorant masses to revolt.

Both of these correspondents are 100-percent wrong. From opposite premises they arrive at a common program for the Communists—a program of sectarian isolation. We Bolsheviks have always had to work out our policies in uncompromising struggle against both these points of view. That is what we mean when we talk about the "struggle on two fronts" among the ranks of the workers; it is the struggle against these two ways of paralyzing the working class.

Critic No. 1 wants a "pure and simple" trade-union fight for immediate demands, with the revolutionaries keeping hands off; he thinks this will make success easier and more probable. This theory, however plausible it may have looked in other times, is today clearly absurd when tested by the most simple reference to actual events. Let us compare two outstanding labor struggles of 1934, the first in which "pure and simple" trade union policy prevailed against Communist policy, the second in which Communist advice was adopted and acted upon by the great majority of workers.

The first was the situation of the automobile workers in March, last year; William Green and the A. F. of L. Executive Council dominated the situation, isolated the revolutionists and made a "trade-union" non-revolutionary settlement of the struggle in collaboration with President Roosevelt. In order to avoid the revolutionary consequences of a general strike in the industry, Green and his associates signed the Roose-

velt pact and the auto code, legalizing the "merit clause" and the company union. The result was the near-destruction of the trade unions, the building of company unions under the direct auspices of the government-appointed Wolman Labor Board and the terrible worsening of the conditions of the auto workers. A year later, Green himself had to denounce the simple continuance of the code, which he himself had signed, as American fascism.

Compare this with the Pacific Coast Marine Workers' general strike, which culminated in the general strike of all San Francisco workers. In this second struggle, it was the revolutionists who isolated the A. F. of L. national officials and prevented them from settling the strike along the line of the auto industry. The struggle was denounced as "Red," as "revolutionary" from one end of the country to the other. Martial law was declared against the strike. But in the end the marine workers were victorious in most of their demands, they built a strong union which entirely eliminated the company unions, and even the San Francisco solidarity general strike resulted in greatly strengthening the whole trade-union movement. From the narrowly practical view of immediate results even, only the policy of the revolutionists "brings home the bacon" for the workers.

Consider, for a moment, the argument of the "ultra-revolutionary" Critic No. 2. (In its purest form this is presented by the Socialist-Labor Party.) Its practical conclusion is exactly the same as that of Critic No. 1, the opportunist; the only difference is, No. 2 puts on a "revolutionary" mask. Both would keep revolutionary ideas out of the day-to-day struggle.

But we Communists declare, and we prove it by experience, that only our revolutionary policies can bring victories for the workers in the day-to-day battles for immediate demands. We reject completely the idea that "The worse are conditions, the better for the revolution." We know that only upon the basis of these daily struggles for bread and a better life can the revolutionary movement be built and prepared for the overthrow of the entire capitalist system. The conclusions from our own experience are supported and deepened by the teachings of Lenin, who led the first successful proletarian revolution.

FROM a number of letters the following related questions are brought together for a common answer:

Is it not true that the capitalist system is collapsing of its own weight? . . . How does the Communist Party make a revolution? . . . Can a revolution be successful with all the terrible weapons of modern warfare in the hands of the capitalist class? . . . Is it not true that a revolution can arise only out of the ruins of an unsuccessful war? And should not revolutionists, therefore, welcome another war, as the sure road to revolution?

That the capitalist system is breaking down, that it is unable to operate more than

a fraction of the existing means of production, that millions of people are thereby condemned to a life of degradation, of slow starvation—these facts are obvious to everyone. But it would be a fatal mistake to conclude from this that the capitalist system will simply "collapse," that the capitalists will surrender their power and that then everybody will get together to build up peacefully some new system. Things don't happen that way. The worse becomes the crisis, the more desperately will the capitalists cling to their power and property, the more murderous will become their attacks upon the masses of the people. Capitalism can only be ended by the organized action of the working class, with the aid of some sections of the middle classes. The revolution does not simply "happen"; it must be "made."

But that does not mean that the Communist Party "makes" the revolution. The revolution is "made" by the great masses of the population; the Communist Party acts as the guide, as the organizer, as the vanguard of these masses; it gives the masses consciousness of their problems and a program to solve these problems.

Further, the transfer of state power from the capitalist class to the working class, which begins the revolution, can be accomplished only under certain conditions which must exist independently of the desires and will of the struggling classes. There must be what we call a "revolutionary situation." Such a situation exists when the ruling class can no longer continue to rule in the old way; when the old economic system can no longer feed the people; when the middle classes themselves are wavering, and a part is turning against the rulers; when the capitalists have lost confidence that they can solve their problems; when capitalist control of the armed forces is being undermined and shaken; and when, therefore, the revolutionary will-to-power of the workers, their heroism, their self-sacrifice and enthusiasm in struggle for the new order, strikes against a ruling class which is already shaken, demoralized and becoming conscious of its own doom. Under

the conditions of a revolutionary situation, the Communist Party wins the active support of the majority of the working class, of a section of the middle classes, neutralizes other parts of the population, wins some of the armed forces to its side, isolates the ruling capitalists and then leads the effective majority of the population to the seizure of state power. This is the first step of revolution. The further steps are: the use of this state power to take possession of the means of production, put the masses to work using them in an organized, planned manner—the reorganization of all economy on socialist lines.

So long as the capitalists can retain unshaken the complete control of the armed forces and weapons of warfare, it can defeat the rebelling masses. But a revolutionary situation shakes also the control of the armed forces; capitalists do not fight their own battles; soldiers are closely connected with the masses; they can be, and must be, won for the revolution. *All revolutions have been made with weapons upon which the overthrown rulers had been relying for their own protection.*

A revolutionary situation may arise quite independently of whether an international war is being fought. It is quite true, however, that any serious, large-scale imperialist war today will inevitably bring about a revolutionary situation. But it does not follow that "revolutionists should welcome another war"; exactly the contrary. Revolution arises out of war, not because "revolutionists welcome the war," but because revolutionists fight against that war before it comes with all their power and continue that fight after war breaks out, to transform it into a civil war against the oppressors. It is only the uncompromising fight *against* war, not the war as such, which leads to revolution.

In his fifth article, next week, Earl Browder will discuss "What will the middle class gain from the Revolution?" Readers are invited to send in questions from week to week.—THE EDITORS.

Questions from Readers

EARL BROWDER

Equality in Soviet Russia

Question: Why is there still inequality among the citizens of the Soviet Union, when socialism is supposed to exist there?

Answer: The basic answer to this question was given last week. A general, abstract equality is not the aim of either socialism or Communism. The slogan of equality has meaning only when directed against *discriminations* and *oppressions* of capitalist or pre-capitalist society. "Equal pay for equal work" is, for example, one of the best (and most universal) expressions of the slogan of equality in its real (not abstract) application. But analyze it for a moment and it becomes clear that this also implies the companion slogan, "Unequal pay for unequal work"; the first cannot be realized without realizing the

second also. Thus the first and most basic application of the equality slogan is found to presume inequality of individuals; the inequality which is attacked is that which violates the natural inequality of men. Another concrete slogan is "Equality of all nationalities," or "Equal rights for Negroes"; here again, we find the slogan of equality directed against those class-created discriminations which rate individuals, not on the basis of merit, but upon prejudice of the individual upon other considerations entirely aside from merit. All such concrete expressions of the slogan of equality are fully and completely carried out in the Soviet Union; and it is precisely for that reason that we find there, for the first time in history, the natural inequalities of capacity among men working out to their conclusion

more and more without distortion of extraneous considerations. Even under Communism there will be nothing approaching the dreams of the equalitarians (those who make a dogma of abstract equality); the socialist rule of reward according to service, which means unequal reward for unequal service, will be replaced by the Communist rule, "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," which again means inequality among individuals according to their unequal abilities and needs, the difference being that under Communism we can dispense with the mechanical linking up of rewards with services because the greatest reward will have become not material considerations, but precisely the opportunity to serve. An abstract ideal of equalizing all individuals in society is thus seen to be pure utopia. And it is a reactionary utopia at that, because every practical policy based upon this idea turns into an obstacle to reaching or building the socialist society.

Dictatorship

Question: Is the dictatorship of the proletariat the same as socialism?

Answer: No, they are not the same, any more than a strong set of teeth and a good stomach are the same thing as a first-class meal. In both cases, the first thing is necessary to the second. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the rule of the working class; that is, democracy for the workers to enable them to "dictate" to the capitalists and their agents. This expresses itself in the *state form* of the Soviet government, which is a government of delegates elected from below by the toiling masses, organized in councils or Soviets. Socialism is the result of the policies carried out by this Soviet government, when it has taken the machinery of production into its hands and operates it for the benefit of the toiling masses and not for profit.

"Primitive Communism"

Question: Is there anything in the Communist movement of today which is similar to and would identify it to some extent with the kind of Communism which used to be the social order before and during the patriarchal period in human history?

Answer: The Communist society toward which we are striving has certain points of identity with primitive communism, together with extremely important points of difference. Common to both is the non-existence of classes, the sharing of labors and rewards, and the consequent social solidarity. But primitive communism was, in the current cant phrase of the day, an "economy of scarcity"; it was the community of poverty; it could not develop the productive capacities of mankind. That is why it had to give way to slave societies, to feudalism, and then to capitalism. Each stage of society was victorious over its predecessor because it carried the productive forces of mankind to a higher stage of development. Each in turn failed and disappeared when it could no longer develop production, but became instead a barrier to further advance. Capitalism gave humanity a tremendous leap forward in developing its productive forces and thereby created the possibilities of socialism; but in its turn capitalism has become a barrier to further advance; instead of going forward, capitalism is now destroying the very productive forces created by itself. Modern Communism must be victorious because it is the only way to free the productive forces to full development. Modern Communism is, therefore, "an economy of abundance"—the only society which can possibly merit that name.

Will The "Present Crisis" End?

Question: Upon what is based the assumption that the present crisis, unlike all previous ones, will not end in a renewed period of prosperity but in social revolution?

Answer: Our answer to this requires more precise definitions of "present crisis." If our reader means

the economic crisis as marked in its beginning by the Wall Street crash of 1929, and would consider it "renewed prosperity" if The New York Times index of production regain the figure of 100—then we must answer that it is not yet certain that this "present crisis" will end in social revolution. But when we speak of the "present crisis" in the sense of the period of general crisis, which began with the World War; the crisis which witnessed the first break in capitalism as a world system and the emergence of the first Socialist Republic on one-sixth of the earth's surface; the crisis which has made any general expansion of capitalist economy impossible because unprofitable; the crisis which has swelled the army of unemployed into a "standing army" of tens of millions who have no hope of reemployment even by "renewed prosperity"; the crisis which has roused the hundreds of millions of colonial peoples to active rebellion against imperialist domination—then we can state, on the basis of these facts which we have cited to describe what we mean by the *general crisis* of capitalism, that a

renewed prosperity in the sense of capitalism rising to new high levels is impossible, that the present period of revolutions and wars can end only in the proletarian revolution. Only the victory of the proletariat, the working class, can solve the problems of the next step forward of the human race, the problems of making mankind the master of the wonderful machinery of production which he himself has created, but of which he is the helpless victim so long as capitalism still persists.

Due to the short period between the time most of our readers get the magazine and the next press time, it is not practicable for Earl Browder to answer questions relating to one week's article in the next week's issue. Moreover, so many questions are coming in that a certain amount of grouping is necessary in order to cover the ground. Thus, half a dozen questions bearing on various phases of one major problem may be covered in one question which strikes at the root of the problem.—THE EDITORS.

