

CPA Discussion Page

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Minor Says Browder Is Basically Wrong

By ROBERT MINOR

I think Comrade Browder makes the very mistake that he attributes to the Board—he takes too lightly (superficially) the question of the dissolution of the Party. Comrade Duclos did not invent the word “dissolution”; he found it in our official publications. Nor did he speak without knowledge that the American Communists have carried out large and successful actions in the huge struggle of the war and of the national election. Yet Duclos makes the dissolution of the Party “the beginning and the end” of his article. There must be a reason for it. He goes deeper than Browder.

Comrade Browder thinks the action described by us as dissolution of the Party threw “strength on the side of the democratic coalition,” and that “probably, although this cannot be proved, . . . if we had decided otherwise Roosevelt would have lost.” Everyone was thoroughly justified in looking upon the reelection of President Roosevelt as obligatory from the point of view of the winning of the war. Beyond question the work of the Communist Party, and later the Association, made a substantial and absolutely indispensable contribution to the reelection of President Roosevelt. But I believe that it did so, not because of, but in spite of serious mistakes, the worst of which was a series of errors inevitably embodied in the dissolution—including a weakening of our presentation of our ideology to the masses—a weakening that was absolutely inseparable from any defense that could be made of a dissolution of the independent political party of the workers.

A Communist Party consists of its organization, its cadres of leadership and its ideology—its scientific

theory. It is true that in making the change we called dissolution, we did not disperse our organization or cadres. But that which distinguishes a Marxist party from all other parties is its ideology, its scientific theory. It is understandable that Comrade Duclos goes straight into the question whether, in the action we called “dissolution of the Party,” there was some degree of sacrifice of our ideology. He encounters Comrade Browder’s statement that “we must be ready also to sacrifice our . . . ideologies. We American Communists have applied this rule first of all to ourselves.” In Comrade Browder’s reference to “departing from orthodoxy” we cannot fail to recognize the classic slogan of revisionism.

Our role in the enormously important national election was mainly that of influencing the great trade union movement and the working class and elements close to it for the greatest possible mass mobilization. In this we were successful. If, however, we avoid sterile preoccupation with might-have-beens and examine the known facts, we see that the weakest points in this electoral mobilization were in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio where in the labor movement certain enemies of the policy of war to victory made some effective use of pseudo-radical slogans and spurious class appeals in their betrayal of the workers.

Do not play with the illusion that the American capitalist class,

especially the larger elements in it, were materially influenced by the distinction between the Communist support of President Roosevelt as a party and as an association. In such an attitude there is an element of gross theoretical disorientation.

It is significant that the first quotation selected by Comrade Duclos as an example of theoretical disorientation, taken from Comrade Browder’s Bridgeport speech, is:

“That (the Teheran declaration) is the only hope of a continuance of civilization in our time.” That this was no mere rhetorical expression is shown by its recurrence in such forms as that, if the Teheran treaty failed, all the world would “slide down into the abyss of chaos, anarchy and fascism” and that “the world would still witness the destruction of civilization.”

This is confusion of cause and effect. It is the mistake of finding the cause of the saving of civilization in the present or permanent willingness of great aggregations of monopoly capital to consent to the formation of such an alliance as that of Teheran.

Ingrained in the very roots of Marxism is the scientific postulate that mankind’s culture is, as Lenin expressed it, in any and all events, “indestructible.” Marxism’s foremost achievement is its disclosure of the reason for this, that in modern society the concrete cause of this assurance lies in the great and inevitably growing class whose leading role in the socialist reorganization of society is the guarantee of the continuance of civilization in our time. After this basic

postulate has acquired a hundred-fold confirmation in the enormous growth of the labor movement in all of the world and by the establishment of a socialist society which has proven to be itself indestructible, it is strange to hear this scientific view denied by a Communist.

The French Marxist Jacques Duclos, who supports Teheran no less than we do, points out in effect that to find the cause in the present willingness of monopoly capital to make an agreement would be a mistake, that the cause lies in the gigantic development of social forces. It is in this sense that Comrade Browder makes a mistake by transforming a diplomatic document into a political platform. Correction of such an error does not imply a lack of importance or a lowering of our estimate of the vast benefit to mankind in the agreement if it is realized, or weaken the appeal to mass support.

This disorientation gives rise to an utterly false notion of the relations of monopoly capital to the masses and of the relations of cause and effect in concrete problems of postwar economy.

After we have, more than a year ago, listened too heedlessly to Comrade Foster’s correct warning against “an extremely dangerous illusion” which consisted in thinking “that Teheran had in any way changed the class nature of capitalism, that the Teheran conference had liquidated the class struggle”—and after Comrade Browder has incorrectly said that “class divisions or political groupings have no significance now except as they reflect one side or the other of this issue”—we cannot be surprised if a

cry of warning comes from a foremost Marxist leader of the French Communist Party.

Among Communists, it is necessary to take responsibility for one’s own actions especially when errors have been made. I am among those who must take a substantial share of the fault for many of the errors which are criticized in the first place as Comrade Browder’s errors. It is my firm conviction that the criticism contained in Comrade Duclos’ article is correct, and that it has the essential quality of being an integral whole. No one has ever attempted to defend on Marxist grounds a proposal that is inherently unsound—as the whole theory and practice of dissolution of the Party is unsound—without misusing Marxist terms. There is a consequent distortion and dilution of the theory of Marxism which becomes more serious the longer it is uncorrected.

There is no question, as the commercial press falsely claims, of the slightest weakening of our support for the Teheran and Crimean accords. Quite the contrary. The criticism is directed toward strengthening the worldwide mass support of the agreement embodied in the Teheran declaration.

The Resolution of the Board, which represents the opinion of all its members, except Comrade Browder, if adopted and applied, will reinvigorate and give a far more solid and enduring support to this agreement among the nations of democracy, the importance of which transcends any that has ever preceded it in history.

Thompson Discusses Browder’s Program

By BOB THOMPSON

In his speech to the National Board, printed in the Sunday Worker of June 8, Earl Browder projects a platform of struggle against the main political line of the resolution

“The Present Situation and Next Tasks” adopted by the National Board on June 2:

The heart of the National Board resolution is its rejection of our past “false concept that after the military defeat of Hitler Germany, the decisive sections of big capital would participate in the struggle to complete the destruction of fascism and would cooperate with the working people in the maintenance of postwar national unity,” and its replacement of this false concept by a Marxist-Leninist estimate of the class nature and role of American monopoly capitalism. From this estimate of the role of monopoly capital stems the resolution’s program of action; the concept of welding and consolidating “the broadest national coalition of all anti-fascist and democratic forces”; and the strong emphasis placed on the independent role and initiative of the working class and especially the progressive labor movement and communists.

Browder’s platform is based on a flat rejection of the National Board’s correction of our former non-Marxian, and dangerously unrealistic, estimate of the role of American monopoly capital. It not only contains the essence of our entire former opportunist line but also, in some respects, carries this line to new extremes.

The Browder thesis rests on two assertions: First, American big business has only to understand and pursue its own class interests in order to play a progressive role in the post-war period. Second, the American capitalist class has the “intelligence” to see its class interests as interpreted by Browder.

Browder develops this thesis by the simple expedient of providing

the American capitalists with two alternatives to the “Teheran path” as outlined in his previous writings. The first is that of immediate war against the Soviet Union. The second is a course which he dubs “armed peace” with the Soviet Union.

Of the first alternative he says, “The bulk of the American bourgeoisie, unless it suddenly goes as insane as Hitler or suddenly for some reason abandons its intelligence, will reject this path.”

Of the second alternative he says, “While this second course of armed peace is superficially much more attractive to the bourgeoisie than immediate war, the first serious analysis of where this course leads, the first effort of thoughtful examination, inevitably reveals it as just as unprofitable and just as dangerous not only to the peoples, but to the bourgeoisie themselves.”

Thus by the simple expedient of ruling out the first and second alternatives, Browder “proves” that American big business will play a progressive role in the postwar period. Browder’s platform is in effect a platform of faith in the ability and intent of American finance capital to lead the nation along democratic and progressive lines.

The inevitable other side of Browder’s position is an underestimation of the role and fighting capacity of the working class. He forgets that within the propertied classes there is a division and conflict of interests and outlook in relation to fascism, and that the working class alone is free of the limitations of these conflicting interests and is therefore the most resolute and inflexible anti-fascist section of the nation. He forgets that the working class is the principal organized sec-

tion of the nation and potentially the most powerful force in the nation, capable in concert with its natural allies of determining the course of the nation. It is upon this force that the National Board resolution bases its sound perspective of a successful fight for an enduring peace and a long term U. S.-Soviet coalition. Browder forgets finally, that the working class is the rising class which represents the socialist future of our country.

Browder’s platform, because it is based on a policy of reliance on the capitalist class, would lead inevitably to the defeat of the working class and the triumph of reaction and fascism. It must be rejected and fought against in its entirety.

It is of course, necessary for any person who has been in the top leadership of our organization during the last period, as I have been, and who therefore bears a full share of the responsibility for our opportunist errors and policies, to give an explanation for his conduct. I must say I have not been able as yet to arrive at an explanation which fully satisfies me either for the errors which were made personally by myself, or collectively by the National Board. Recognizing that a

great deal will have to be said by myself and by others on this subject in the future, I would like now to set down just a few thoughts on reasons for my own errors.

1. I drew a number of very shallow conclusions from my experiences and observations during this war, both from my period of military service and since my discharge. For example, from the general win-the-war role played by the bulk of the ruling class when it was confronted by the threat of Hitler Germany, I found it possible to justify a line based on the expectation that this class might play a similar role in the postwar period in relation to the struggle against fascism and for democratic objectives. Clearly no person with an essential mastery of Marxist theory would have drawn such superficial conclusions.

2. My first big mistake was not made in accepting Browder’s interpretation of Teheran in January 1944. It was made a couple of months earlier when on returning from overseas I read “Victory and After” and after a momentary hesitation and reluctance accepted the propositions in this book, especially its last chapter, which contained in embryo, the opportunist line which

we later developed in a full-fledged manner. At that time I conditioned myself to swallowing an opportunist gnat and as is inevitable in such cases wound up by swallowing elephants. At this point I want to make it clear that while I entered the leadership of the CPA at the time of the convention in May, 1944, my responsibility for the opportunist mistakes made by no means consists solely of passive acceptance of these mistakes, serious as that would be in itself. I believed in this line, and during my period of active participation in the leadership of the CPA I have contributed within the limits of my capacity to elaborating and applying this line.

3. I think one of the factors in my errors has been a very superficial understanding of the past history of our Communist movement; of a ten-year old tendency of American Marxists to eulogize the liberal section of the American capitalists and to depend on it for initiative and leadership among the masses; of a failure to understand the tendency stemming from American conditions towards the development of theories of American exceptionalism. And in this connection, I want to add a failure to appreciate the role of Comrade Foster, for 40 years the finest example of an American workingclass leader. It is only in connection with this last point that I can explain the stupidly arrogant manner in which I often failed to pay proper attention to the point of view presented many times in our National Board discussions by Comrade Foster.

Because of space limitations it is impossible to continue this subject further in this piece. I wish to make it clear, however, that this is only an initial step in my participation in our movement’s self-critical examination of individual and collective errors.

Would Print Foster’s Letter

Editors:

Have read the statement that was printed in last Monday’s Daily Worker and agree with its analysis.

May I suggest that Foster’s complete letter written last year wherein he disagreed with Browder’s analysis be printed in full to enrich the discussions now taking place throughout the country. (Had this been done at the time Foster wrote it, either the error that we made would not have occurred or else our realization of our error would have crystallized much sooner than it

did. However, I believe Foster was in error in agreeing with the rest of the board in not making his feelings and analysis public. This is not congruous with my conception of democratic centralism.

I also believe that Browder’s discussion with the statement published last week be made clearer.

Of one thing I am most certain, our group is mature enough not to permit factional attitudes and will emerge stronger than ever, having learned a great deal from the past two years. AL LOEW.