

What Is Communism?

9. Labor Party and Communist Party

EARL BROWDER

FROM among a score of questions about the problem of a Labor Party and the relation of the Communist Party to it, the following is selected as representative:

"Why don't you speak for yourself, John?" Why does the Communist Party advocate the formation of another Party, a Labor Party, instead of calling upon all workers to come directly into the Communist Party? Do you think you can thereby inveigle the workers into a revolution they don't yet want, or have you abandoned the idea of revolution?

We are speaking for ourselves, dear questioner, in the sense of speaking for the revolutionary program of the Communist Party, popularizing it among ever-wider masses and building our Party. In fact, we are doing this on a scale never before seen in our country. It is exactly as one means of rooting the Communist Party among greater masses than ever, that we advocate the formation of a federative Labor Party, based upon the trade unions and other mass organizations and including the Communist and Socialist Parties.

Our proposal for the formation of a Labor Party is one feature (at present the outstanding one) of the policy of "the united front." The principle of the united front policy is that, faced with the attacks of the capitalist class, the workers must bring together all their organizations for joint defense of their immediate interests, in spite of all differences that exist regarding the bigger issues of program, of questions about whether capitalism should be overthrown, how it is to be done, what kind of government and social system should follow the capitalist system. The united front may be a joint fight on a single issue, for a limited time; or it may be for a rounded-out program of immediate demands for a long period. A Labor Party, such as we propose, is only a higher form of the united front, carrying the fight for as many immediate demands as possible over into the political field, into the struggle for positions in the elected institutions of government, to make use of these positions to advance the united struggle against the capitalists.

It is not a part of the permanent program of the Communists, this proposal for a Labor Party. It is raised at present only in the United States and here only because of the particular circumstances of the historical moment. What are these special circumstances which led us to propose a Labor Party?

As the result of nearly six years of economic crisis, we witness the first stages of development of a political crisis in the United States. Large masses are being disillusioned with the Roosevelt New Deal, as they were previously disillusioned with the Hoover Old Deal. The

two traditional major political parties of American capitalism, Republican and Democratic, are openly exhibiting all signs of disintegration. A hundred signs of this can be noted, outstanding among them being: the Epic and Utopian movements in California, spreading also to the Northwestern States; the new "Progressive" Party of the LaFollettes in Wisconsin; the renewed life in the Farmer-Labor Party movement controlling Minnesota; the spectacular rise of the radio priest, Father Coughlin, and his Union for Social Justice; the movement around the Southern demagogue, Huey Long, with his "share-the-wealth" program; the Townsend old-age pension and currency scheme, with its claimed nineteen million signatures of support.

On the one hand, the leadership and program of these multi-varied movements are either almost indistinguishable from the old parties (LaFollette) or are fantastically utopian and not intended ever to be carried out; they are therefore reactionary in character and a part of the general drift toward fascism in the ranks of the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the mood and the ideology among the masses supporting these movements represent a break away from the old parties and from the present capitalist system; these masses are in the process of being revolutionized, they are looking for a new way out, they can be led upon the paths of struggle against the capitalist class and thus prepared through their own experience for the socialist revolution.

Millions of workers and middle-class strata have cut loose from their old moorings. They are adrift in a stormy sea of social upheaval. They follow false leaders and programs. The problem is, how can these millions most quickly be brought into the paths of class struggle, to understand their own class interests, to recognize the class enemy?

We of the Communist Party would be delighted if we could swing these millions immediately behind our program and Party. But we are cold realists. We know that these masses still lack the experiences necessary to bring them solidly under our leadership. At the same time it is urgently, vitally necessary to prevent these masses from being drawn into the channels of a fascism which would create new and formidable obstacles to the further development of the struggle.

In our judgment this direction of the millions now breaking away from the old parties into the path of struggle against Wall Street (that is, against monopoly capital), could best be achieved under present conditions by bringing, first of all, the trade unions (and around

them all other mass organizations of the exploited people) to a united effort to extend their fight for immediate economic and political demands to the field of independent political action, federating all their organizations into a Labor Party.

A possible program for such a Party, having the broadest immediate mass appeal and raising a minimum of problems difficult for immediate mass understanding, would contain something like the following points:

- a. To support by all means the strike movements for union recognition, against every wage cut, against every lengthening of hours and worsening of conditions.
- b. To fight for the immediate enactment of the Workers' Unemployment, Old-age and Social Insurance Bill, now before Congress as H.R.2827.
- c. For immediate payment of the veterans' bonus, as embodied in H.R.8365.
- d. For the Farmers' Emergency Relief Bill, before Congress as H.R. 3471.
- e. For complete equality for the Negro people, including the enactment of a Negro Rights Bill.
- f. For civil rights, repeal of all alien and sedition legislation directed against the masses, repeal of deportation laws.
- g. For the struggle against fascism and imperialist war, on the lines of the broad united front program of the American League Against War and Fascism, which includes full support to the peace policy of the Soviet Union.

Here are immediate issues that already involve in organization and struggles from eight to ten millions of people, with the immediate possibility to draw in another ten millions. A strong lead given toward the inclusive federation of all organizations now fighting for one or another of these things, into a joint struggle for all of them through a Labor Party, would have the possibility of immediate and decisive successes.

Would such a Labor Party, with such a program, be anything such as our questioner suggested, an attempt to "trick" the masses into revolution? Nothing of the kind. There is no trick about it; everything is open and above board. There is no doubt, however, the experience of such a movement would give a revolutionary education to the masses. The Communist Party, by being in such a movement, by being in the very forefront, would influence it greatly, would strengthen it and at the same time strengthen itself. Would this, on the other hand, mean abandoning the idea of revolution? On the contrary, it would bring the masses, through their own experiences, face to face with the problems of state power and therefore all the problems of revolution, in the quickest possible way. Such a Labor Party, without the revolutionary program of the Communists for socialism and

the proletarian revolution, would develop all the issues of every-day life. Therefore, it would develop the masses toward the Communist program. For our program does not arise independently in our minds, it arises from life itself, from all the multitude of problems of the masses, from the problems of bread and butter and a chance for peaceful life.

That is why we are for a Labor Party. And that is why our proposal for a Labor Party is at the same time the most important measure of the moment for extending the influence and strength of the Communist Party.

A NOTHER correspondent raises an important question when he asks:

Why do you spend so much time and energy trying to get a united front with the Socialist Party, the leaders of which spurn your efforts? The S.P. is smaller in membership than the C.P., even though it still casts a larger vote in some important places. Why not concentrate all forces upon the struggle for a broad Labor Party, for trade-union unification, etc., which are a thousand times more important than the small and moribund S.P.?

This questioner has failed to understand that our efforts to arrive at a united front with the Socialist Party and its followers are in no way an effort to *substitute* this for the broader united front, but on the contrary, is a *means to arrive quicker* at that goal.

First of all, it is a mistake to think of the S.P. as "negligible," as "dead or paralyzed." True, the S.P. is small in membership; and at present it is in the throes of a deep-going faction fight and split. But neither of these facts argue for ignoring it. If it is small, so is the Communist Party; and it still counts among its followers some thousands of workers with an elementary understanding of socialism and class relations. These socialist workers are not among the most backward, but on the contrary, they must be counted generally among the most advanced, on the whole ahead of the broad masses. It is of the most enormous importance to win them to united action with the Communists; it will multiply our joint strength at least tenfold among the masses.

The building of a united front between the Socialist and Communist Parties is one of the keys to the creation of a broad Labor Party, it is one of the keys to uniting the scattered trade-union forces, it is one of the keys to the unity of the unemployed mass organizations. Our Central Committee has placed the question of the fight for this united front as one of the first questions of the day.

The "old guard" leaders of the Socialist Party are fighting against the united front with an hysterical frenzy. The "militants" are for the united front "in principle" but always find too many practical obstacles to be able to do anything. The majority of the members and followers favor the united front, but do not find channels to express themselves, nor leaders to help. Yet in spite of all the united front moves forward.

The chief argument against united action advanced by the S. P. leaders is to the effect

that they must choose: *either*, unity of action with the broad masses of workers in the American Federation of Labor; *or*, unity of action with the Communists. They say the Executive Council of the A. F. of L. forces this position on them. This is a *camouflage*, to hide their real alignment, which is with William Green and the Executive Council but against the broad masses of membership as well as against the Communists. This camouflage was torn to bits by the New York fur workers of the A. F. of L., who finally united with the independent union (including Communists) but only in open struggle against the S. P. leaders who joined with Green in threatening to expel the entire union, all the broad rank and file of the A. F. of L. fur workers, if they dared to unite with the Communists. Unity of the broad masses was only achieved by going against the "old guard" S. P. leadership.

We Communists are frankly critical of our own past weaknesses and mistakes in approaching the Socialist worker for a united front. We have nothing to change in our basic analysis of the political problems and relationship of classes, groups and tendencies. But we have much to change in our practical work and in our approach to the Socialist workers. We are striving for a frank, comradely contact and discussion with them on all our common problems. We are willing to listen to and carefully examine all criticisms against us and hope to be able to gain much from it; we want to reciprocate and give the Socialists the benefit of our observations and criticisms.

The "old guard" screams frantically that we Communists are only maneuvering to destroy the Socialist Party. They do not explain why a united front would be more dangerous for the Socialist Party than for the Communist Party, nor why any really working-class party should lose anything from a greater unity against the capitalists. They even see a "conspiracy" against them when the Communists advise those Socialist workers who are discouraged and thinking of dropping out of the S. P., not to do so, but to stay in their Party and continue the fight for the united front.

It is clear from the experience of the united front in France, that all workers have only to gain from the united front. In France they succeeded in stopping the advance of fascism. The united front, after a year, was unanimously endorsed by the Congress of the French S. P. Only the united front halted the break-up and disintegration of the French Socialist Party.

The Socialist Party of the United States is in a deep crisis. The "old guard" is openly organizing a split. If the majority leadership of the S. P. had the courage to come out boldly for the united front, like their French brothers, they could isolate and defeat the "old guard." If they fail to do this, it is clear the "old guard" will smash up their Party rather thoroughly. It is not the Communists who are disrupting the ranks of the Socialist workers.

Earl Browder's final article in this series, to appear next week, will discuss a Soviet America.

Letters from Readers

Comment by EARL BROWDER

Is There An "Inner Shrine"?

TO THE NEW MASSES:

I have been reading your articles on "What is Communism?" with the greatest interest and pleasure. Several times I was tempted to write to THE NEW MASSES and express my appreciation of your valuable contributions. The fundamental principles of Communism cannot be too frequently expounded.

Always having been a liberal and by nature a rebel, I stand by principle and emotionally for the underprivileged. Unfortunately, I was not "to their manor born." For the which, however, I hate being frozen out every time I want to get close to the movement. Those in my class have a double task—we have almost more to unlearn than to learn. At every repulsion on the part of the "inner shrine," we lose something—courage! Why should we give up the pot of flesh, only to find that we are not admitted to the thin gruel?

If the economic revolution were so near at hand, I could appreciate the "holier than thou" attitude, but we have still a long mile to "Tipperary," hence, en route, a comradery should be permitted between the middle-professional and working classes.

I am impelled to send in this little contribution by the concluding paragraph of Mr. Browder's article in the current number (May 21st) of THE NEW MASSES. It is too long a paragraph to incorporate into this contribution; my quarrel with Mr. Browder is his condescension to "every individual of the enemy classes . . . such people have no value or significance, beyond the moment, for the revolu-

tionary movement. What momentary value they may have is usually more than offset by the confusion and dangers which they bring with them."

Quite an indictment against the middle-class, so-called intellectuals. At this moment, I cannot see how a laborer who comes to the revolutionary movement with no more qualifications for the "necessity of abolishing capitalism" can and is "able to make serious and lasting contributions to the cause of socialism."

Even as I write, I realize that Mr. Browder stands for orthodox Communism. I cannot quarrel with him on that stand. But Lenin was surely more flexible when he introduced the N.E.P., realizing that to take a step back, often promotes two steps forward.

I am a member of the lower middle-class. I am thinking in terms of Communism and am taking that stand everywhere and among members of my family and friends. I am unprepared for conversion by "absolute immersion." I would like to be allowed to be a liaison between my class and the brave men and women in the thick of the fight. I know my limitations as a worker for Communism, but, nonetheless, I earnestly wish to give my mite.

While I do not want Communists to "fall on my neck," I resent the orthodoxy which keeps me out of the "charmed circle." Perhaps if I were allowed on the periphery—I mean I and my class—we could eventually join the ranks and further the cause of socialism (I do not mean New York socialism).

In my many talks with people veering leftward, I feel I am not only writing now for myself, but for

a large majority who are thinking very earnestly, if not so clearly, on the forthcoming revolution, for which many of us are quite ready to make extreme sacrifices.

New York.

E. R.

Comment: Our correspondent makes the cardinal mistake of imagining there is some "inner shrine" or "charmed circle" in the revolutionary movement. Seeking for any such Holy Grail, she is doomed to perpetual disappointment and permanent frustration. She will never arrive there, not because anyone is shutting her out, but simply because there is no such thing.

There may be here and there some remnants of a sectarian "holier than thou" attitude in the movement; but this is mostly to be found precisely among the newest recruits and most strongly among the middle-class elements; it is rare among the workers and especially rare among the experienced revolutionists (which is where, presumably, any "inner shrine" would be located!).

The comradeship that our correspondent is looking for does not drop down from the skies. It does not come from "conversion by absolute immersion." It is only to be found as a by-product of common practical work in everyday life. The problem, then, is to find some practical way of participating in and helping the work of the movement. From that everything else follows.

There is serious misunderstanding of my previous article in that quotation given, which drops out some important words and then accuses me of "condescension" toward middle-class individuals. To quote me as saying "every individual of the enemy classes . . . such people have no value or significance, beyond the moment, for the revolutionary movement," is a gross distortion. What I said was that those who come to the movement "through temporary and unstable moods and sentimental ideas" have no value beyond the moment and even bring with them dangers of confusion. This, of course, does not apply to those who have some basis of serious understanding, something more permanent than unstable moods and sentimental ideas.

We cannot, of course, accept our correspondent's thought that these articles represent "orthodox Communism," while the teachings of Lenin do not. If these articles have any value, it is only to the extent that they faithfully apply the full range of Lenin's contribution to our American problems.

Our correspondent seems to be still searching for an emotional solution of her problems. But that will only come indirectly when a more basic way has been found in practical, every-day political life. Turn your attention in that direction.



William Sanderson

Twilight of Mosley

M. B. SCHNAPPER

LONDON.

"**B** RITAIN will find her greatest destiny through fascism . . . We are determined to build here the greatest state in the world . . . England has an historic right to be in India and we don't intend to leave. . . . Only fascism can protect England from the menace of Communism. . . .

"If England is to pull itself out of the present crisis, if England is to fulfill her manifest destiny in the world, if England is to . . . then England must and will adopt fascism."

The speaker was a youthful Blackshirt in the squalid St. Pancras district of London. Blackshirt was written all over him: black his pants, black his sweater-shirt—black his words. He spoke well, if bombastically; the tricks of oratory stood him in good stead when at loss for a convincing statement. And his little audience of fifty—a self-blending mixture of white-collar workers and manual laborers—seemed to listen attentively. Sprinkled here and there in the audience were stolid Blackshirts, hands folded across the chest, faces taut, bodies sternly erect. Disciplined men, these—disciplined in a ludicrous sort of way.

Several Blackshirts stood guard by one of the notorious Blackshirt armored cars. (According to the Earl of Kinnoull, the Blackshirts have twenty-five such armored cars, each constructed of heavy steel and capable of carrying twenty persons.)

A voice rose from the audience. "What has fascism done for the folks in Italy and Germany?" Obviously the question is an unfriendly one. The questioner is a bluff old fellow, swathed in a huge and dirty scarf. A hotel porter, possibly.

The Blackshirt speaker, annoyed, hesitates a moment and then spews the lingo of Oswald Mosley, Blackshirt No. 1:

"Why, fascism has revitalized life in those countries, contrary to the lying propaganda you read in the newspapers. Hitler has practically wiped out unemployment. Mussolini has raised the standard of living and given his countrymen a real sense of national pride! . . . Uh—"

"Oh yeah?"

"So Hitler is just a bloomin' angel!"

"Did you ever hear of any sort of terror in Germany?"

"Come now, my boy, Hitler is no pal of yours."

"You know perfectly well that Hitler and Mussolini have stepped on the necks of the common people."

The heckling developed into a minor storm suddenly. Just as suddenly the Blackshirts swung into action; they began to shove and beat the dissenters in the audience. Equally suddenly the white-collar and manual workers,

uniting almost spontaneously, went for the Blackshirts. Fists flew. A woman screamed hysterically as two Blackshirts, armed with a heavy piece of rubber hose, attacked a man near her. A variety of missiles came hurtling from the small windows of the armored cars: stones, milkbottles, sticks.

In a few minutes the Blackshirts had whipped up the anger of the entire crowd to such a heat that they were forced to retreat to their armored car, several nursing bruises. Two persons in the audience were bleeding at the mouth, another had a swollen jaw.

That was a typical though unimportant Blackshirt meeting, observed by the writer. Here are some of the more important meetings and their casualties:

Several beaten at Glasgow Green by a Mosley bodyguard composed of "Kid" Lewis and other prizefighters. September, 1931.

An anti-war meeting at Croydon was disrupted by Fascist hooligans. Three injured. August, 1932.

Rubber-hose weapons first introduced at Manchester meeting from which opposing workers were driven out by these weapons. March, 1933.

Evidence at Gateshead-on-Tyne court case revealed that Mosley's supporters carried pieces of steel wrapped in cloth and rubber bludgeons. May, 1934.

Armed with metal knuckles, Blackshirts attacked students and workers at Oxford. Three women students stated: "Some Blackshirts kicked in the face and neck men who already could not struggle. Certain men were thrown bodily down the stone steps." November, 1933.

Two men ejected from Bristol meeting. One carried out unconscious, his head swathed in bandages and covered with blood. March, 1934.

At Brighton the chairman of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement was beaten unconscious by Blackshirts at a meeting which they had invited him to attend. March, 1934.

Blackshirt brutality reached its height at the Olympia meeting in London. According to the report of the Home Secretary, seven men were treated for serious injuries at the West London Hospital alone. It was estimated that there were about a dozen other unreported cases. May, 1934.

Repulsed by the Blackshirts' violence, the British bourgeoisie and working class have been, at least temporarily, disillusioned about the virtues of Mosley's brand of fascism. Since the Olympia meeting, almost exactly a year ago, the Blackshirt movement has declined rapidly. Gone are all the huge meetings, gone are the Rothermeres and other endorsers, gone are the big membership campaigns. Many of the followers who sincerely