

Foster On Revisionism In the C.P.A.

By William Z. Foster

In order to draw the fullest conclusions from the National Board's draft resolution it is necessary that we have in the present Party discussion a thorough theoretical clarification of our policies and work. Especially, we must uncover the roots of those errors which are correctly characterized as opportunism and revisionism of Marxism, and which I emphatically warned against in my letter of January 20, 1944, to the National Committee.

For this revisionism Comrade Browder must bear the major responsibility. His recent writings, especially since the conference of Teheran, have been saturated with it and, because of his great personal prestige in our Party, coupled with a lack of adequate political discussion in our ranks, he has been able to press much of his revisionist ideas into our Party's policies.

Comrade Browder's revisionism has the same class roots and goes in the same general direction as the traditional revisionism of Social Democracy. The essence of Social Democratic revisionism is the belief that capitalism is fundamentally progressive and that the big bourgeoisie may, therefore, be

relied upon to lead the nation to peace and prosperity. The practical effects of this false conception are to throw the workers under the reactionary influence of the big capitalists and to blunt their progressive and revolutionary initiative. Where these policies lead to, if persisted in, is indicated by the tragic debacle of German Social Democracy. Such revisionism is a reflection in the workers ranks of the class interests of the big bourgeoisie.

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The revisionist ideas that were being developed by Comrade Browder are also based upon the groundless assumption that capitalism is now progressive. On this theory he proceeded to develop in his book "Teheran, Our Path in War and Peace," a capitalist utopia which far outdid anything produced anywhere by Social Democratic revisionists. Typically, too, he developed theories about the "progressive" and "intelligence" of finance capital. In consequence, the policies he formulated on the basis of these wrong conclusions tended to subordinate the workers to the influence of reactionary capitalists. Comrade Browder's theories violated many basic principles of Marxism-Leninism. They were a complete departure from Lenin's analysis of the present imperialist stage of capitalism.

The above assertion that Comrade Browder's ideas tended towards cultivating big bourgeois influence in our ranks may startle some of our Party members; hence a few brief illustrations of this tendency, from the practical life of our Party, during the past 18 months may be instructive:

1.—While our general wartime policy of supporting the Roosevelt Administration was correct, we made the mistake, under Browder's influence, of failing to criticize many errors and shortcomings of the Roosevelt government. Various instances of this could be cited, a typical example being our recent defense of the appointment of Stettinius, a reactionary, as Secretary of State. The political cause of this error was an underestimation of the reactionary forces within the Roosevelt Administration and a failure to appreciate the need to fight them boldly.

2.—Then there was the failure, throughout the war, to demand that organized labor be admitted into the Roosevelt government on a coalition basis. Browder opposed every suggestion of this character, even objecting to the demand that organized labor should be given adequate representation in the Roosevelt cabinet. Such an attitude indicated the revisionist feeling that all was safe under the leadership of the bourgeoisie and that labor should not disturb the "harmonious" class relationships by making unpleasant demands for representation in top Administration circles. That labor's general political position was weakened by not being represented in the Roosevelt cabinet on a coalition basis is obvious. It is not less clear that our Party,

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by failing to raise this important demand, lost a very good opportunity to strengthen its own position of leadership among the working class and the nation.

3.—There was also the rejection by Comrade Browder of proposals, made in the National Board over a year ago, to the effect that labor should demand representation at all international conferences held by the United Nations for the prosecution of the war and the preparations for the peace. This demand is now being pushed by the new World Trade Union Federation, but Browder was opposed to it in principle. He argued that we must not insist upon labor representatives at such conferences. So we did not make the demand. Browder could arrive at such an opportunistic position only upon the basis of his incorrect belief that labor's and the nation's interests were being adequately taken care of by our bourgeois government. It was only after the London Trade Union Conference had demanded representation at all United Nations gatherings that we, too, took up the demand.

4.—A similar mistake of Comrade Browder's was his acceptance of the two-party system virtually in perpetuity. He speaks almost reverently of "the stone wall of the two-party system." Here again is a tendency to accept bourgeois leadership and to underestimate working class initiative. While there is at the present time no basis for a third party movement, such a development cannot be simply ruled out permanently. Philip Murray, in the January, 1944, American Magazine, stated the matter much better than Browder when he said that the political situation in the United States at this time does not justify the formation of a third party.

Browder's overestimation of the solidity of the two-party system was a major factor in leading him (and, unfortunately, our Party) into the harmful action of dissolving the Communist Party and reorganizing our forces into the CPA. This was a logical step for him to take; for, believing that the bourgeoisie had become progressive, he naturally underestimated the need for a strong, independent Communist Party of the working class.

5.—Comrade Browder's serious concern that our Party should not attack the trusts as such was a natural result of his general illusion as to the progressive character of the big bourgeoisie. The only regulations of monopoly practices that should take place, he argued, were those which the monopolists themselves should agree to. This, of course, would mean to give the monopolists a free hand and to leave the people at their mercy. But this prospect did not alarm Browder, for he believed that finance capital, in "its most decisive sections," was following a progressive line in the war and would also do so in the peace. Browder castigated as dangerous leftism all demands that the workers and the people should curb the monopolies. Thus, under this definition, Roosevelt, Wallace, Murray, Hillman, and even William Green himself were guilty of leftism for warning the people against the danger of monopolistic domination and exploitation.

6.—Typical also, of Comrade Browder's belief in the progressivism of the big bourgeoisie were

his incredible proposals to the effect that in the postwar period the capitalists would voluntarily double the wages of the workers. He argued that the employers would do this because "they must find the solution in order to keep their plants in operation." Such an illusion was carrying reliance upon the "intelligence" and "progressivism" of the big bourgeoisie to the point of utter absurdity. This nonsense injured our Party's prestige, and had the workers been foolish enough to believe it they would have been rendered helpless in the face of the profit-hungry capitalists.

7.—Akin to the above absurdity was Comrade Browder's proposal that in the vitally important matter of developing American foreign trade, "the government shall go no further in this direction (to regulation—W.Z.F.) than the capitalists themselves demand." He was willing to leave the "free enterprisers" build up foreign trade "entirely and completely by their own chosen methods." Imagine what a golden field of exploitation would be opened up to the export-capitalists were the American people to leave the whole question of foreign trade in such hands.

8.—Again Comrade Browder showed his desire not to offend the big capitalists (who were supposedly cooperating with us to achieve the postwar democratic proposals of Teheran) by his easy acceptance of their slogan of "free enterprise." This demagogic watchword was in reality a demand for a free hand, economically and politically, for the monopolists. Frankness compels the admission that Roosevelt, Wallace, Murray and others did a better job at exposing the reactionary content of this big business slogan than Comrade Browder did.

9.—Comrade Browder's belief in a postwar-class collaboration for many years with the big bourgeoisie, a theory for which he was so severely castigated by Duclos, flowed naturally from the revisionist ideas that he was developing. For, if the big capitalists were in the mood to raise voluntarily the wages of their workers; if they were so progressive that they could be trusted with the regulation of our foreign trade; if they were supporting generally the democratic objectives of Teheran—then, surely the workers would have little about which to quarrel with them. In such a picture, the conception of the class struggle simply disappears.

10.—Another logical product of Comrade Browder's revisionist theorizing was his attempt to exorcise imperialism out of existence. Especially, he could see no danger whatever from American imperialism. Although the big capitalists in this country obviously are maneuvering and driving to establish their hegemony over the war-torn world, Comrade Browder could not see it. He has not even mentioned publicly the concept or the term, "American imperialism," for the past 18 months. Indeed, as late as the very eve of the San Francisco conference, Browder, in a National Board meeting, scoffed at warnings against the danger of the machinations of imperialists at the conference. He denied emphatically, in fact, that there was any such danger, asserting that no important sections of the American bourgeoisie are nursing plans for world domination.

As part of his theories of the liquidation of imperialism, Comrade Browder especially underesti-

mated the hostility in the ranks of finance capital in the United States and Great Britain towards the USSR. His idea was that "Britain and the United States have closed the books finally and forever on their old expectation that the Soviet Union as a Socialist country is going to disappear some day." The danger of Comrade Browder's opportunistic complacency in this vital matter is being dramatized by the present dangerous anti-Soviet campaigns in both Great Britain and the United States, although the USSR has barely finished its historic task of bearing the brunt of the war to save humanity from Fascist slavery.

11.—Comrade Browder's faith in the progressivism of present-day capitalism and its ruling bourgeoisie had its ultimate expression in his curt dismissal of the whole question of socialism in our country, not only as an immediate political issue (in which he was correct) but also in the sense of mass education (in which he was wrong). He even abandoned all criticism of capitalism as a system of exploitation of the workers. All this, too, is logical in Comrade Browder's revisionist thinking. For if it were true that the capitalist world, rejuvenated by the war and by its contact with the USSR, was going, under the leadership of a progressive bourgeoisie, into a new period of prodigious expansion that would bring "generations of prosperity" to the peoples of the world, then indeed, socialism for the USA would become a matter of only very remote and abstract interest.

To the foregoing list of Comrade Browder's opportunistic ideas and proposals many more could be added. We must understand that these are not isolated, unrelated errors; they constitute a whole system of revisionist thinking. They involve violations of basic principles of Marxism-Leninism and must be eliminated from our Party theory and practice.

As the National Board's resolution points out, Comrade Browder's revisionism was wrong throughout the whole war period, since the Party accepted his incorrect analysis of the Teheran agreement 18 months ago. His report should have been rejected at the January, 1944, meeting of our National Committee. Browder's opportunism has done much harm to our otherwise sound wartime policy, and it would have been disastrous had it been continued over into the postwar period.

The resolution of the National Board constitutes a fundamental correction in theory and practice of Comrade Browder's errors. It furnishes the basis for the widest unity of the people for the realization of the democratic goals of Teheran and Yalta; it provides practical policies to help build the great national democratic coalition which, in the postwar period, must be broad enough to include the workers, farmers, professionals, small businessmen, and also those groupings among the bourgeoisie who support Roosevelt's anti-Axis policies, and who understand that the alternative to Yalta would be economic chaos, a big growth of fascism, and a new world war. It is our great task therefore, to mobilize all our forces behind the National Board's resolution and, when it is endorsed by our National Committee and membership, to bring it effectively before the labor movement and the whole American people.

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POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Articles based on the discussion at the June meeting of the National Committee • Resolution of the National Committee • The January, 1944, letter of Wm. Z. Foster.

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