

# What Is Communism?

## 8. Americanism—Who Are the Americans?

EARL BROWDER

**N**ONE of the correspondents of **THE NEW MASSES** has sent in any questions about the good old stand-bys of "Americanism" and its relation to Communism. And yet this series would not be complete, it would have a serious gap, if we pass it over in silence. After all, the one question asked of Communists more than all others, if we can judge from the daily newspapers, is this:

"If you don't like this country, why don't you go back where you came from?"

Truth is, if you insist on knowing, Mr. Hearst, we Communists like this country very much. We cannot think of any other spot on the globe where we would rather be than exactly this one. We love our country. Our affection is all the more deep in that we have watered it with the sweat of our labor in the gigantic efforts of the workers that made this country what it is; our mothers nourished it with the tears they shed over the troubles and tragedies of rearing babies in a land controlled by profit and profit-makers. If we did not love our country so much, perhaps we would surrender it to Wall Street.

Of course when we speak of our love of America, we mean something quite different from what Mr. Hearst is speaking about in his daily editorial diatribes. We mean we love the masses of the toiling people. We find in these *masses* a great reservoir of all things admirable and lovable, all things that make life worth living. We are filled with anger when we see millions of these people we love being degraded more and more, starved, oppressed and beaten and jailed when they protest. We develop a deep and moving hatred against the system and against those who fatten on the system that turns our potential paradise into a living hell.

We are determined to save our country from the hell of capitalism. And most of us were born here, so Hearst's gag is not addressed to us anyway. But workers in America who happen to have been born abroad are just as much Americans as anybody else. We all originated across the waters, except perhaps a tiny minority of pure-blooded Indians. And the foreign-born workers have worked harder for less wages on behalf of this country than anybody else and deserve, at the minimum, a little courtesy from those who would speak of Americanism. There is less historical justification in America than perhaps in any other major country for that narrow nationalism, that chauvinism, that makes a cult of a "chosen people." We in America are a mongrel breed and we glory in it. We are the products of a melting pot

of a couple of hundred nationalities. Our origin as a nation acknowledged its debt to a Polish Kosciusko, a French Lafayette and countless other "foreigners."

Furthermore, let's be careful not to get snooty about pedigrees; half the names in the American social register originated in men who were transported from Europe on conviction of crime or who in the new country became bold bandits and buccaneers. It was the more aggressive and violent types who rose to the top most quickly in our early days and laid the foundations of the great American fortunes. They were the Al Capones of their day, with no income-tax department to bring them to grief.

We love also the past history of America and its masses, in spite of the Astors and Vanderbilts. We find in it a wealth of tradition striped in the purple tints of glory—the glory of men and women fighting fearlessly and self-sacrificingly against the throttling hand of a dead past, for those things upon which further progress depended.

Around the birth of our country as an independent nation cluster such heroic names as those of Patrick Henry, whose famous shout, "As for me, give me liberty or give me death!" re-echoes down the corridors of time; of Thomas Paine, whose deathless contribution to our national life of a militant anti-clericalism has long survived the many pamphlets with which he fought, the form of which already belongs to a past age; of Thomas Jefferson, whose favorite thought revolved about watering the tree of liberty with the blood of tyrants (he thought this "natural manure" should be applied to the tree about every twenty years!); of all the founding fathers, whose chief, when not only, claim to glory lies in their "treason" to the "constitutional government" of their day, and among whom the most opprobrious epithet was "loyalist."

These men, in their own time, faced the issues of the day, cut through the red tape of legalism and constitutionalism with a sword, made revolutions, killed off a dying and outworn system and opened up a new chapter in world history.

Our American giants of 1776 were the "international incendiaries" of their day. They inspired revolutions throughout the world. The great French Revolution, the reverberations of which filled Europe's ears for the entire nineteenth century, took its first steps under the impulse given by the American revolution. The Declaration of Independence was for that time what the Communist Manifesto is for ours. Copy all the most hysterical Hearst editorials of today

against Moscow, Lenin, Stalin, substitute the words America, Washington, Jefferson, and the result is an almost verbatim copy of the diatribes of English and European reactionary politicians in the closing years of the eighteenth century against our American founding fathers. Revolution was then "an alien doctrine imported from America" as now it is "imported from Moscow."

After the *counter-revolution* engineered by Alexander Hamilton had been victorious and established itself under the *Constitution* in 1787, a period of reaction set in. That was, like our modern days since the World War, a period of oppressive legislation which went down in history as the "Alien and Sedition Laws." But the American masses had not been mastered; those who rode high and mighty with their eighteenth century counter-parts of criminal syndicalism laws, deportations, Dicksteins and McCormicks, were driven out of power in a struggle, often bloody and violent, which again for a period placed the representatives of the masses (then predominantly agrarian) in control of government.

The greatest figure of them all in the American tradition, Abraham Lincoln, became great because he, despite his own desire to avoid or compromise the struggle, was forced by history to lead to victory a long and bloody civil war whose only historical significance was the wiping out of chattel slavery, the destruction of private property in persons, the amending of the Constitution in the only way it has ever been fundamentally amended. Lincoln's words which still live today among the masses, are those which declared:

This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it, or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it.

These words of Lincoln are but a paraphrasing of the Declaration of Independence. Our national holiday, July 4, is in memory of the giving to the world of that immortal document of American history. The very heart of the Declaration, that which gives it life, without which all else becomes empty phrases, are these lines, the memory of which had grown dim until the Communists rescued them from the dust of libraries:

Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends [life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness], it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it and to institute a new government, laying its foundations on such principles and organizing its powers in such forms,

as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. . . . When a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them [the masses] under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government and to provide new guards for their future security.

This is the heart of the American tradition. Without this revolutionary kernel, the whole history of our country becomes only the strutting of marionettes and stuffed shirts, the spread-eagle oratory of the Fourth of July under imperialism, the vulgar yappings of the Hearst press. Patriotism becomes, as that acid critic of the British bourgeoisie, Dr. Johnson, described it: "The last refuge of a scoundrel."

The revolutionary tradition is the heart of Americanism. That is incontestable, unless we are ready to agree that Americanism means what Hearst says, slavery to outlived institutions, preservation of privilege, the degradation of the masses.

We Communists claim the revolutionary traditions of Americanism. We are the only ones who continue those traditions and apply them to the problems of today.

*We are the Americans and Communism is the Americanism of the twentieth century.*

That does not mean, of course, that we Communists raise the slogan of "Back to 1776." Such reactionary stupidity was committed by the LaFollette "third-party" movement in 1924, typical as that movement was of a class-grouping that had lost any historical progressive meaning. That was no more in the spirit of our revolutionary forefathers, than it would have been for the Declaration of Independence to proclaim "Back to the Republic of Rome." To each day its own tasks; that of 1776 was to free the rising capitalism from the fetters of a dying feudal system, enabling it to expand the productive forces of mankind to a new high level; that of today is to free these tremendous productive forces created by capitalism but now being choked and destroyed because they have grown too big to live longer under capitalist property relations.

Americanism, in this revolutionary sense, means to stand in the forefront of human progress. It means never to submit to the forces of decay and death. It means constantly to free ourselves of the old, the outworn, the decaying and to press forward to the young, the vital, the living, the expanding. It means to fight like hell against those who would plow under the crops in our fields, who would close down and scrap our factories, who would keep millions of willing toilers, anxious to create the good things of life, living like beggars upon charity.

Americanism, as we understand it, means to appropriate for our country all the best achievements of the human mind in all lands. Just as the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence had been nurtured upon the French Encyclopedists and the British classical political economists, so the men who will write our modern Declaration of Independ-

dence of a dying capitalist system must feed themselves upon the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, the modern representatives of human progress.

In the words of a famous American whose memory we love, we say to Mr. Hearst and all the Red-baiting cohorts of Wall Street: "If that be treason, make the most of it."

This is how we American Communists read the history of our country. This is what we mean by Americanism. This is how we

love our country, with the same burning love which Lenin bore for Russia, his native land. Like Lenin, we will fight to free our land from the blood-sucking reactionaries, place it in the hands of the masses and bring it into the international brotherhood of a World Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.

*In his ninth article, next week, Earl Browder will discuss the question of a Labor Party.*

## Letters from Readers

COMMENT BY EARL BROWDER

### Will Communists "Sell Out"?

Earl Browder,  
c/o NEW MASSES.

I cannot bring myself to agree with you and other Communist writers who advocate sudden or violent revolution as a method of establishing a planned social system. There is one grave question which serves as the greatest obstacle in the way of an indorsement of your viewpoint. I am sure that it is of greatest importance that you answer this question, or at least realize its presence; for it is undoubtedly in the minds of millions of people with radical leanings. And it would appear that they are kept, more than anything else by the dark shadow of uncertainty cast by this question, from placing their shoulders whole-heartedly to the wheel of any revolutionary movement. I state this question as follows:

In the May 14 issue of THE NEW MASSES, in your treating of the question, "What Is Communism?" you give a brief history of various parties that have in the past designated themselves as "Socialist." You show how the party leaders had finally "adjusted themselves to capitalism and to the desires of the capitalist class. They had been absorbed into the capitalist ruling machine . . . repudiating, overnight, all their pledges for uncompromising struggle against war . . . which meant the cessation of struggle for the interests of the workers." In short, the leaders "double-crossed" their followers and "sold out" to the capitalistic interests.

The question, then, is this:

What assurance is there that the Communist leaders would not do the same?

All perusal of history teaches us that never in spite of all the "successful" revolutions of the past have the people been lifted from oppression or the blight of exploitation. The leaders have used their power to further their own ends, and while they have lived upon the fat of the land, the great masses have remained still economically insecure. What, then, is to assure us that the Communist leaders of today have a higher and more permanent ratio of love for humanity over self than all the great revolutionary leaders of history? Than the above-mentioned Socialist leaders? Than even the common politicians of today, who do practically everything but carry out their campaign promises? You realize, my friend, that a revolution is a tremendous thing. Is it not too much, then, considering human nature, and in the light of the above, to expect that thinking people should faithfully believe that a certain group of men have suddenly taken upon themselves Messianic attributes—to love, forever, humanity more than themselves—to give themselves rather than exploit others—to serving, rather than being served?

We need an economical and political revolution, but first we must have an educational revolution. There is far too much diversification of opinion due to ignorance and distortion of the facts. Because of this, if there were a revolution tomorrow, nothing but a dictatorship and its co-partner, fascism, could maintain stability.

Four million of the people of our country can neither read nor write in any language. Millions of our children are given no school education beyond the fourth grade. The great majority of our adult population understand nothing of the fundamentals of economics or government. My mother, for instance, is firmly possessed by the conviction that the depression was caused by women entering politics. A university upper-classman next door believes that our troubles could be solved by taking the married women out of the commercial world.

"The foundation of a stable government," says Robert Quillen, "is a population dumb enough not to realize what is going on." He is undoubtedly right. But fortunately that is not the *only* foundation. We have an alternative—a population smart enough to govern itself. Our people are just beginning to realize that there is something wrong and to precipitate trouble, threatening the stability of our present order. But they are as yet far too uneducated to bring about and maintain a social system subservient to their own interests.

It would appear that our only hope is in the slow and painful process of educational and democratic revolution. As education becomes more and more universal, as it is raised to a higher and higher plane, and as people come to a closer and closer intimacy with the facts (and they will, in spite of propaganda, even as people finally accepted the Copernican cosmology despite the tremendous sophism of "orthodoxy"), an efficient social system will be established by the sheer weight of popular opinion swayed in common accord by truths undeniable. Such a system, so installed, would not—like the present system—quake and quiver at the inroads of truth; but like the Copernican astronomy, would become only more and more established as truth advanced. Based upon truth, it would be stability itself.

How foolish is it not then to advocate violent or sudden revolution, when, to maintain stability amid the present hodge-podge of popular opinions, it would only necessitate dictatorship—a threat, rather than a guarantee of service, to the general welfare?

Evidently, Mr. Browder, the race is purely between education and catastrophe. And we are fighting most strategically when we educate first ourselves and then the masses. You are doing your part in meeting the propaganda from the Right; and, as to this phase of your work, I can only give you my highest commendation.

Minneapolis.

OSCAR E. JOHNSON.

*Comment:* This letter deals with two questions. First, what assurance is there that the Communist leaders will not betray the working class? The answer to this is, *the assurance of an organized party with a revolutionary program.* Without this Party there would be, of course, no assurance. The old Second International leaders could betray, because they had first corrupted the program of the Party; after that came the corruption of the leading individuals of the Party generally. The Communist

Party has demonstrated, is demonstrating, its ability to defeat and throw off all attempts to corrupt its program. That is the significance of the existence of many little sects of renegades from Communism; if the Party was politically unhealthy, those poisonous groups would still be in its ranks. The ability of the Party to throw them off quickly and almost painlessly is the sign of its political health.

Our correspondent reads history, evidently, without the assistance of Marx, if he really finds the cause for continued oppression, "in spite of all the successful revolutions of the past," is the ethical weaknesses of leaders. Past revolutions (that is, before the Russian revolution), did nothing to abolish the basis of class divisions; necessarily, therefore, they could not abolish oppression even though all the leaders had been purest saints. The Russian revolution, even though not made by saints but only by a Party of honest revolutionists, *did* lift the people from oppression and the blight of exploitation; that is because its program of action struck at the roots of class division, by abolishing private property in the means of production. Is there any one in the world today still repeating that old exploded canard that in the Soviet Union the leaders "live on the fat of the land while the masses remain economically insecure"? Only Hearst, and a few of his paid agents! No, all the best ethics in the world will accomplish nothing without the correct program; given that program and a Party to carry

it out, the necessary ethics are hammered out and developed in the course of struggle.

The second point of our correspondent is his placing of "an educational revolution" as the pre-condition for any economical and political revolutions. But this order for the course of social change is standing reality on its head. How can an educational revolution take place while the economic system on which education rests is that of capitalist private property? Obviously, it cannot take place. And how can an economic revolution take place, while the political power is still in the hands of those who profit from the present economic system? Obviously, it cannot take place. The passing of political power into the hands of the working class is the necessary pre-condition for any economic or cultural revolution. Any other approach means to abandon science and go over to utopian or religious fantasies.

Like most people still under the influence of philosophic idealism, our correspondent seems to think the question of violence in the class struggle is a matter of choice, or of "advocacy." Communists do not advocate violence. That would be stupid and we are not stupid, whatever else we may be. But we recognize that it is inevitable and we, therefore, do not waste our time and energy weeping about it and "advocating" against it. Instead we call upon all who suffer from capitalist violence to organize themselves for effective defense against

it. We tell the masses to have no illusions that they can find a way out of the crisis which avoids such a decision as that made in a previous crisis by the Declaration of Independence. This issue is not raised simply by the Communist program; it existed in all previous revolutions. It is a part of all basic historical changes. To think to avoid it by refraining from "advocating" it, is merely to imitate the traditional ostrich, which according to the fable hides his head in the sand and thinks thereby he has concealed himself from his enemy.

"The sheer weight of popular opinion" never did and never will "establish" anything. Historical changes come out of class struggles, from classes organized and fighting for particular programs. When the fight has been decided in favor of one side, "popular opinion" then crystallizes around the new institutions that are set up. To those who can see only the new institutions and newly crystallizing "popular opinion," it may look as if the first arise automatically as a result of the second; but that is a mere optical illusion. The new institutions are the cause and "popular opinion" is the effect; in its turn the new institutions must have a cause, but that is found in the victory of a new class in a life-and-death struggle with the old. Our correspondent has evidently not studied as yet the most elementary lessons of Karl Marx. We publish his letter as a typical expression of the futility of reasoning from such foundations.

# West Coast Labor on the March

DAWN LOVELACE

PORTLAND, ORE.

FOR one born and reared to the call of a sawmill whistle, whose early memories are a confusion of the fragrance of fresh-cut lumber, of saw-dust flecks clinging to overalls and of half articulate mutterings against the indignities inflicted by the boss, the strike of 40,000 sawmill and timber workers releases a gulp of satisfaction long awaited. Experiences forgotten and buried by more recent experience stir and crop to the surface of your mind, giving a tang to the headlines that jitter and whine, bluster and snarl the fears and hatred of the "lumber barons." Sawmills silenced and numbed by walkouts, with pickets pacing before the gates that have sucked in the hours of millhands, where machinery and lumber piles grind and batter human beings into weary, dejected shapelessness and spew them out in the evening at the hoot of the whistle—remembering, your eyes look long at the silent yards and you strain something like a chuckle and a curse through your teeth. Remembering, you know that this has been coming for years. You know that this strike was not created in a day—a week—or a month. You know—with a crazy exultation—that into its fabric are woven the post-war wage-cuts, the lying and bally-hooing, the flag-waving and strutting of well-fed 4L organizers and spokesmen who talked with a precise, academic accent and whose hands never felt the splinters of timber.

Your own memories, you realize, are like the thoughts that have been pounding in the brains of the men in the logging camps and

mills as they have been moving together—turning their backs on the blatant Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen and organizing in a union of their own choosing. In their laughter—in the expressions on their faces—you can see something of that combined exultation and bitterness distilling and ripening through the years and flaring to action-impelling consciousness with the demand for wage increases; for shorter hours and for union recognition. Union recognition . . . behind the phrase crowds the history of the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen and the years when so many loggers and millhands secretly carried a red card and fought for better conditions in the camps and mills—fought class-consciously and tenaciously—only to have the Loyal Legion of straw-bosses and yes-men tell how they raised the wage-standards of workers in the lumber industry.

Even now—during the past few weeks when logging boots have caught the rhythm of unity and militancy—the 4L has been busy with conferences—little gatherings of foremen and employers conferring and making decisions for labor. They have been higgling over pennies—over whether or not the hourly minimum should be raised a cent or two with all the apparently complacent, smug unawareness of the gathering strike storm that the Adjutant General's headquarters felt toward the Argonne. The press statements and reports resulting from these conferences have struck a hollow, unreal note in the growing tension, just as 4L flag-waving and Hun-hunting was a sham and crude slander and libel against

loggers and lumbermen during the War.

For one who remembers the sound of mill whistles—whose childhood pours out memories of a sawmill town or of several sawmill towns—the immediate issues have roots that reach back and back, drawing nourishment and significance out of the past. And you know that thousands—seventy-five or a hundred thousand sawmill and timber workers walking out of the mills and camps are remembering, too, more vividly, more sharply. You can laugh at the hysterical desperation of the operators and owners during the recent weeks since the strike started seething.

At one camp they tried to raise a forbidding hand against the whirl-wind and fired fifty union workers. That camp was the first to go out—and within a few days the whole Clark and Wilson mechanism—the camp and two sawmills—were shut down, the first volley in the war to come. Every sawmill, every harbor has humbled and roared with speed-up as operators scurried to fill the orders that came pouring in. The scurry—the piles of fresh lumber in the mill yards; the hooting and snorting of lumber freighters as propellers impatiently churned the waters moving cargo to fill orders that kept coming in—all of this gave the lie to the whinnying announcements that there would be no general lumber strike and if the workers were dumb enough—the owners would be grateful. Lumber barons watching orders pile up in a mad dash to beat May 6, the walkout date, lashed operations with panicky desperation and issued jubilant statements that decreased in jubility