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# MASTERY OF THEORY AND METHODS OF WORK\*

BY EARL BROWDER

I THINK, comrades, in closing this important plenum of our National Committee, we need only to note a few points for special emphasis. There has been no difference of opinion disclosed in the three days of discussion which need any solution. We have had a discussion here which I think has been quite correctly described as representing a new high level of the work of our committee. I think the work of these last three days has registered what is going on throughout the country. There could be no meeting such as we have had except as the expression of a growing Party, living and working in the very heart of the American people and representing its most dynamic element.

There have been so many outstanding contributions to our discussion that it is difficult to pick out any single one for special mention without running the risk of injustice to others equally good. It would be impossible, however, to summarize our discussions without mentioning the contribution of Comrade Schneiderman which reflected the great work of our California Party, the work of

which is better than any thesis in showing us the road to victory. Our comrades in California proved their thesis in life, and there is nothing that confirms the correctness of policy so much as to have it result in victory. Victory is what we are driving for everywhere. And in those places where victory is most decisive, especially when it is a victory won under most adverse conditions, this has great lessons for every section of our Party. This experience in California was well and graphically presented by Comrade Schneiderman.

I think that we have much to learn also from the continued study of the experiences of our Party in the state of Washington, which has made such great advances under the leadership of Comrade Raport. These sections of our Party which showed the most decisive advances must become the objectives of detailed study by all of us. I know that last summer, when Comrade Stachel and I made a visit to the Pacific Coast, we came back from there with the feeling that we had learned new things about America. We gave the experience of the Pacific Coast very prolonged and detailed study. We are continuing that study, and I think that all of us throughout

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the Party can very profitably do the same.

We had a most interesting contribution from Oklahoma. But I wonder how many of us felt the tremendous significance of the reported campaigns of reactionary demagoguery current in Oklahoma. What is this situation in Oklahoma? It is the complete disintegration of the economic, political, social and cultural life of the people of a section of the country, a disintegration out of which nothing appears yet to lead and organize the people. And yet it would be a great mistake to overemphasize that absence of leadership as yet, because, in spite of everything, the tremendous ferment of the population of Oklahoma that expresses itself in such fantastic forms at times surely has as yet its main orientation on the progressive policies of the New Deal. It is not organized; it has no local leadership that can bring it together, and restore on a new basis the lost social stability.

What conclusions must we draw when we face such situations? That we have a tremendous job to do in such territories. And there are many of these territories in the United States, not always embracing a whole state; but in every state we have communities in the same condition. We must begin to get into these communities more than we have, and we must carry to them the things that these people are looking for, first of all principled politics and cultural life. When we take these things to them we will quickly become a power in these communities.

I think it would be necessary also for us to say a word of emphasis on the participation of the young people

in the growing mass movements of the country, in all phases. Everyone is paying great attention to the youth nowadays, because the youth is active, youth is in motion; the young people will go where they find serious response to their demands and their needs, and recognition of their place in society and in the particular mass movements which deal with them. We do not yet give sufficient response to the youth, although we are doing better than before. It is necessary to emphasize this. This is also true of the growing participation of women in political life, and we must constantly keep every section of our organization sensitive to the special requirements of these particular groups.

In my report, I did not take up that question which was a central point in the Tenth Convention—our approach to the Catholics and work among them. This received very correct emphasis from many of the speakers here, and I think that we should register that since the Tenth Convention we have made considerable progress and gained very important experience in this; but still we are only scratching the surface of the possibilities.

We have learned that the Reverend Currans and Father Coughlins do not represent the American people. Neither do they represent the Catholic Church. They are the lunatic fringe of the Catholic community. It is a grave mistake to treat them as representatives of the Catholic Church. We should defend the Catholics against such an imputation and not make it ourselves. Particularly at this moment, when the Catholic Church itself is undergoing the most

profound heart-searching and reorientation in world and domestic questions, we must get close to the Catholics, sympathetically close to them, and assist them in their reorientation. There is information that indicates that not only is the Catholic Church in profound struggle with the Hitler regime, but that the whole Catholic Church may be in open struggle against Mussolini in the very near future. More and more, world Catholicism finds its main base in the United States. What happens to the Catholics in the United States may be decisive for world Catholicism in the near future. We are not only solving one of our domestic problems when we help to influence the integration of the Catholic community into the democratic front, which is possible; we will be doing a job, the repercussions of which will be immediately felt in countries abroad.

We have had some deeper discussion in the course of this meeting than at any previous one of problems of the allies of the working class, the middle classes, particularly the farmers. I don't want to repeat what has been said here, except to emphasize again the importance of this question. Comrade Minor's speech was especially important. If we have learned anything from the last elections, surely we must have learned the profound necessity of the keenest sensitivity to what is going on among these allied strata of the population, to understand that there is where the sharpest struggle will take place between the democratic forces and fascism for the possession of the people. And if we defeat fascism there, we shall have de-

feated fascism nationally in our country.

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We have had a very needed examination in many details of the struggle against Trotskyite-Lovestoneite wreckers and agents of fascism. This question is going to grow even sharper in the future. These forces are not only generated spontaneously with the process of the disintegration of the capitalist society; they are artificially cultivated in laboratories; they are a part of the poison gas and germ warfare of fascism against the people. And by the way, we should forget that old term of "renegade" that was used in the period when these people were being driven out of our Party. That was so long ago that it is ancient history. They are enemies not merely of our Party, but enemies of the people, enemies of the working class, criminal elements, degenerate tools of fascism; they belong with the stool-pigeons, provocateurs and other underworld characters. Let us brand that character upon them wherever they show themselves.

The struggle against Red-baiting has been disclosed in the discussion here as having been a universally growing characteristic of the election campaign and of the political life of the country generally. We must develop ever more skillfully our counter-action to the campaign of the Red-baiters, whose central instrument is the Dies Un-American Committee.

Insofar as we are dealing with people among whom we work and who know us, we have had very little difficulty in dispersing the attacks of the Dies Committee's Red-scare campaign; among much broader circles, it

has been relatively easy to turn the effective weapon of public ridicule against its obvious and manifest absurdities; while among the thinking, conscious section of the population, our counter-attack against the Dies Committee has been effective.

But it would be the greatest mistake to underestimate the effect of this Red scare campaign, especially among the masses of the politically passive people, the stay-at-homes, the inactive ones, who get the impact mainly of the general charge of something seditious and un-American, dispersed very broadly over everything progressive; the only kind of answer that reaches them is that which just disclaims the charge that the New Deal is Communistic, but which leaves the assumption that if it were Communistic, it would be something terrible and un-American which would have to be stamped out in America.

There is not the slightest doubt that the agents of reaction expected us to be successful in countering the Dies Committee among the thinking section of the population; but the Dies Committee was staged, not for the benefit of the thinking section of the population, but for the stay-at-home, inactive section of the population; and among these, there is not the slightest doubt that it has registered against the New Deal, against the progressive forces, and against the Communist Party.

I think that we must give constantly increased attention to the question of reaching these broadest masses with the answer to the Dies Committee, and probably one of the best places for that will be the com-

ing session of Congress, where we will find, in some way, the chance to make Congress *our* forum—not only Dies' forum, but ours—to reach the country on this question and to dramatize to the country the actual relation of our Party to the progressive forces in the country, to the nation, its interests, its history, traditions and institutions.

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Unquestionably, we have approached in this plenum much closer than before to that very essential problem of the quality of our work. We have directed the attention of the whole Party to the study of the quality of the work of the branch. But I think it would be well for us also, in closing, to recall that basic task that we have assumed for every member of the Party—the task of the individual approach to improving the quality of the work, the necessity for everyone of us to be engaged constantly in self-study, perfecting our equipment, raising the quality of our work.

This is especially important for those of us who approach middle-age. As we begin to lose some of the boundless energies of youth, the only possible way we can continue to be useful and effective is to improve the quality of our work, to do less leg work and more head work.

“Head work” does not mean “headline work.” The President coined what I am sure will become an immortal phrase when he spoke today of “headline mentality.” Now, this headline mentality is, of course, cultivated by reaction in America; but its influence reaches even into our own ranks. How many of us have been influenced by the headlines of the newspapers? I am sure that it includes

everybody. And I am sure that if we gained a certain relative freedom from the influence of the headlines, it is only by consciously building up our resistance. I am also sure that some of our comrades at critical moments have felt the influence of panic and pessimism thrown among them by the headlines of the newspapers.

If we are going to conduct a struggle against the headline mentality in the country, we have to be very strongly armed against the influence of this headline mentality in our own ranks. That means arming ourselves strongly in basic understanding, in mastering theory. The mastery of theory includes also the mastery of methods of work—methods of work that have become the hallmark of the seriously trained Communists throughout the world. Let us remind ourselves of a few of the features of this Bolshevik quality, methods of work.

One of the first of these is modesty. We still have around our Party traces of the old tendency of boasting. We must edit this out, strike it out, and eliminate every trace of boastfulness, especially in our approach to the masses. We must learn how we can develop the firmest ideological intransigence, complete, uncompromising, sternest struggle on every question in which principle is involved, and combine this with greatest flexibility, the utmost sensitiveness to the peculiarities of the concrete application of our principle, and a sympathetic human approach to the people, to the persons who are involved. Some cannot be ideologically intransigent without immediately engaging in war with anybody

who does not accept our ideology.

But that is not what we mean by ideological intransigence. We can defend our principles, without trying to force their acceptance by an unwilling person, especially when we remember that forceful methods in that connection are never successful. We have to convince. We have to be patient if we are going to convince, and will convince more quickly if we have a sympathetic, human contact. Inflexibility is the greatest enemy. Sectarianism and dogmatism are other names for it. Flexibility does not compromise principle, and that we certainly understand if we understand our principles deeply enough. That is why we talk about self-study so much, the deepening of our understanding of the principles upon which we are working.

A characteristic of Leninist work is this, that it is never overcome by a difficulty or a defeat. It is never baffled by an obstacle. It always knows how to find that point or that feature in a difficulty or obstacle or defeat which can be seized upon to turn it into its opposite. This is the very essence of our philosophy, and it has to be the sharpest point of our practice. Everything that we are doing is to change what is to something better—a transformation of a particular thing in a particular part of the world, as part of the big job of transforming the whole world. We cannot transform the whole world unless we recognize that in the world there are the forces existing for that transformation. The degree of maturity of a Communist leader is the degree to which he is able to take the initiative and the leadership in transforming an

obstacle into an assistance, a difficulty into a help, a defeat into a victory.

Factors exist in the world outside of ourselves that enable us to do that, if we ourselves are mentally strong enough to find those factors and to seize them. That is why we are not dismayed or thrown into panic when the reactionaries gain victories in the elections. Right in the very victories of the reactionaries we find that factor that we can seize upon for their defeat; we examined the situation and we found they got their victory by unlimited use of demagoguery. We will seize every promise they made to the masses and organize the masses against them on it, and they will either join the progressive camp or the masses will be torn away from them. The more demagoguery they use the faster that will come about.

Comrade Anderson, in his excellent speech, may have been giving us the rules of the boxing ring, I don't know; but those rules apply just as much to politics. I think it would be a good idea to remember the formula he gave us. As I remember it, he said the victory goes to the one who hits first, hits oftenest, hits hardest, and hits last. I think if we combine that with another directive to think first, think fastest, think deepest, and think last, we have the perfect characteristic for disciples of Lenin and Stalin.

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There are a few most important things we must discuss a little before I close—one is aid to Spain and China. I have a feeling we did not discuss this question enough in detail at this meeting. The tasks involved are the immediate tactical expression of our whole foreign policy, without which

everything else becomes mere talk. These are the immediate pressing questions on which we must get immediate results.

Munich has so awakened America to the fact that fascism in Spain is a menace to American interests that even some conservative circles are taking up the demand to feed Spain. It is only a few months ago that only the progressives demanded that American food be sent to Spain. Now, even such people as Dorothy Thompson have joined. We should welcome that very much. It is proof of the political correctness of the slogan and we welcome such proof. It demonstrates that we can enlist the widest circles in America in demanding food for Spain. The Dorothy Thompsons and others, whose aid is very valuable, should be welcomed in the warmest terms.

We should remember, however, that the zeal of these recent recruits tends to lessen if *we* turn *our* attention to other things, thinking that now that there is such a broad movement we can leave the job for them to do. I wish we could; but experience has proved that we cannot. Such people have taken up these issues only when they are afraid the Communists will get too broad support if these issues are left only in our hands; and they will maintain their zeal to the degree that they have a little competition from us. We must keep that competition going; especially must we help to develop energetically the work of the North American Committee, the Medical Bureau, and the independent shipments of food to Spain. The one American Relief Ship that was sent, besides feeding many wo-

men and children, had a most profound political effect throughout the world. But if that first ship is followed up with another and another, that is going to be the instrument that will start a whole series of American ships carrying food to Spain.

I must say a word of emphasis on the question of the veterans of the Lincoln Brigade, especially those who are coming back soon. Some eight or nine hundred are on their way. These boys who came from almost every state in the Union, who were the ambassadors of American democracy to the Spanish republic, are coming back enormously enriched in experience and having undergone some terrific trials. They are going to need our help to be fully reabsorbed into the daily life which has become so strange to them, having lived in a world of war, the most barbarous kind of war, most of them for the last two years. We must in an organized way, very patiently and systematically, help establish the guarantees everywhere, that each one in his own community, in his own state, is absorbed back into the everyday life of our people so that the great contributions they have to make to us will become possible. They are not coming back with these great contributions all tied up in a bundle in their pockets ready to pull out and show you; only in after years will you be able to measure the tremendous addition to our forces that these boys are going to be. Potentially they are a great force, but how much of that we realize depends upon how seriously we take this problem. I hope that everyone of us takes specially to heart the appeal of the Friends of the Lincoln Brigade and

that we see that the Party is sensitive to this question everywhere, that it acts in a serious and responsible manner.

China becomes a great issue for all the American people in this coming year. America is waking up to the question of China. We are not doing enough to help this process, however. You know we in America have one of the finest magazines, published anywhere, about China. But this magazine, *China Today*, which receives universal praise among all who know anything about China and its importance, still has a shamefully small circulation. This shows that we are not giving sufficient attention to China. We must understand that China is one of the keys to winning the American people for our whole peace policy.

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In the coming session of Congress, we are going to fight for the repeal or fundamental amendment of the Neutrality Law. This is the next big step in the establishment of a positive peace policy for America. There can be no fight for peace which is not resistance to fascist aggression. There can be no peace policy that does not discriminate between the fascist aggressor and the victims. There can be no positive peace policy which does not help the victims against aggression. And in the fight for the amendment to the Neutrality Law, let us be careful not to fall for the false issues of reaction which will always try to avoid a head-on struggle, to tangle up the issue in a lot of side issues.

The reactionaries raise a great cry that to vest discretion in the President to decide who is the aggressor

and who is not is a step towards the creation of a fascist dictatorship in America. And they say in order to guard against fascism at home we must continue to help fascism abroad. We must expose the shameful falseness of this position.

It does not make any difference to us who puts the official finger on the aggressor, the thing we want to establish is that the finger must be put, and whether it is Congress or the President, we know they can put the finger only on one spot, because everyone knows who the aggressors are. We want an embargo against the aggressor governments, and we will support whatever measure promises most surely to attain this.

And that brings me to my final point. In the resolution you have adopted this evening, you will notice that it finished by summarizing the deliberations of this plenum with the slogan "For Social and National Security."

In that formulation are summarized the needs of the present moment, which involve the interests of the people of America, and which, consistently pursued, step by step, lead to the full program which we propose for the democratic front. There is special value in this particular combination of four words: Social and National Security. In the coming Congress the reactionaries will come forward as the champions of a national security to which social security must be sacrificed. And we are going to have all the muddleheads of the Norman Thomas type come forward and demand social security without national security. And from these two angles reaction is going to try to break

up the unity of the people and come back to power, playing social security against national security and national security against social security.

We must make it clear to the people of America that, while we want social security for the entire people, its achievement is threatened by fascist aggression, which threatens to drag the whole world into war. Social security requires the security of the nation, and every honest American citizen, if he accepts the idea of *social and national security*, will inevitably, pursuing those things step by step, have to adopt a world view of peace, organizing all democratic forces of the Americas as a condition for security of the United States, the unity of the Americas with the oppressed peoples and the democratic forces of Europe, the leadership of America in organizing the world peace forces, the cooperation of America with the Soviet Union, for this purpose.

This is no dream. Within all circles of American society people are thinking along these lines. The upper bourgeoisie itself is divided on this question. Only part of them are ready to go along Chamberlain's path, and those who are not ready to go with Chamberlain already realize consciously that they must go with the Soviet Union. The people are facing this issue, and with this slogan, of social and national security, we can become ten-fold more effective in contributing to the organization of the democratic front in America, welding into a solid force the majority that will guarantee the victory for the people of America, victory for the democracies of the world, in the coming struggle.