

What Is Communism?

2. Questions About the Movement

EARL BROWDER

WE NOW take up the series of questions received from readers relating to the Communist Party, its program, its relations to other groups and organizations, and to the various classes. Typical of the whole group of questions is the following, which furnishes us with a good starting point. A "puzzled reader" of *THE NEW MASSES* writes:

After reading your magazine for six months, on one question I am more mixed up than ever. I used to think there was a Socialist Party that stood for Socialism, and a Communist Party that stood for Communism. But from *THE NEW MASSES* I have learned that the Communist Party stands for Socialism, apparently the same thing that the Socialist Party stands for, but for a different method of getting it, and that there is a life-and-death struggle going on between these two Parties that stand for the same thing. What is the sense of all this?

Let us try to untangle the puzzle for our questioner:

First of all, we should establish the general proposition so ably put by Shakespeare in that phrase: "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Names are important, but we must always go behind them and judge by facts, by deeds. Who, for example, in search of democracy, would go to Tammany Hall, in spite of its bearing the official title of "Democratic Party"? Who would go to Hitler's "National Socialist Labor Party" to learn anything about socialism or labor? The socialism of the Socialist Party is rapidly becoming almost as remote as the democratic principles of Tammany Hall. At the same time, this name has an historical origin, directly connected with the rise of the modern socialist movement.

Let us briefly sketch the history of modern socialism, that is, scientific socialism, as distinguished from the Utopian type. Its origin dates from 1847, when Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote the famous document, *The Communist Manifesto*. This *Manifesto* laid down the basic principles of scientific socialism in such a clear and developed form that it holds good down to today, and in all fundamental respects reads like a contemporary document. *The Manifesto*, together with the subsequent writings of Marx and Engels, soon dominated the thought and action of the rising working-class movement in Europe, and to a degree, in America. Its principles later became the basis for the First International and still later, for a period, of the Second International, both of which were international associations of various Socialist Parties and to some degree of the trade-union movement.

From 1847 on, we thus see the name Communist and Socialist used more or less interchangeably, as the name for the dominant trend in one organized movement, a trend which was embodied and given its best expression in the writings of Marx and Engels. Originally, Marx and Engels and their associates definitely chose the name "Communist," in order more sharply to distinguish themselves from the various schools of Utopian or petty-bourgeois socialism. Later on, and especially under the influence of the growth of the mass Socialist Party in Germany, the name Socialist, or Social-Democratic, came to the fore, and the label of Communism was generally relegated to the theoretical works and text-books.

The outbreak of the World War in 1914 disclosed to the working class of the whole world that the leadership of the Socialist Parties in most countries had completed a process, begun years before, of the abandonment of the basic aims of the modern socialist movement. They had adjusted themselves to capitalism and to the desires of the capitalist class. They had been absorbed into the capitalist ruling machine. When the supreme test of the World War came, this fact was dramatically exposed through the action of these leaders in repudiating, overnight, all their pledges for uncompromising struggle against war, by their voting war credits to their respective governments, by their declaration of class peace within each country, which meant the cessation of struggle for the interests of the workers, and by their accepting of government posts in the war administrations, and becoming actual recruiting officers for the imperialist armies, each in support of his own national ruling class.

The collapse of the Second International at the outbreak of the World War came as a surprise, as a revelation to the masses of the workers in most countries. It had, however, long been foreseen and predicted by those Socialists who had remained true to the teachings of Marx and Engels. These, the revolutionary Socialists, had for years been combatting the growing opportunism and degeneration in the leadership of the various national Socialist Parties. In only one party, however, had Marxism remained predominant. That party was the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (Bolsheviks) under the leadership of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. That party, since 1903, had politically and organizationally separated itself from the opportunism and revisionism of the dominant leadership of the Second International. On the outbreak of the war, it was the only party which not only set itself to uncompromising

opposition to the imperialist war, but also broadcast a clear program of struggle to transform the imperialist war into a civil war against the exploiting classes and for the establishment of the new socialist system.

It was the existence of such a revolutionary, Marxian Socialist Party, which in the first place made it possible for the first break in the capitalist system to occur in Russia—the establishment of the first working-class government, the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, which was later incorporated into the broader Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.

One year after the establishment of the Soviet Power in Russia, the collapse of German and Austrian imperialism placed power in the hands of the opportunist leaders of Social-Democracy. In contrast to the Russian Bolsheviks (the Marxian Socialists), the leaders of German and Austrian Social-Democracy used their power, not to establish a workers' government and to inaugurate socialism, but on the contrary to crush, with the help of the counter-revolutionary officers, the revolutionary working class and to restore the state power to the hands of the capitalists. The rupture between the two tendencies in socialism had been completed. In every country the Socialist movement divided between those who supported and wished to follow the example of the Bolsheviks and those who supported and followed the leaders of German Social-Democracy.

In 1919 this already accomplished split was given organizational form on a world scale, with the founding of the Communist International as the World Party of revolutionary socialism, under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, and, on the other hand, the re-establishment of the old Second International as a world coalition of opportunism and collaboration to restore the capitalist system, under the leadership of the German Social-Democrats.

It was Lenin and the Bolsheviks who proposed sharply to distinguish revolutionary socialism from the opportunist Second International by restoring the old and honorable name Communist, the original banner raised by Marx and Engels in 1847.

Here is how Lenin placed the question in his immortal pamphlet, *Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*, published April 10, 1917, immediately after his return to Russia:

I am coming to the last point, the name of our Party. We must call ourselves the Communist Party—just as Marx and Engels called themselves Communists.

We must insist that we are Marxists and that we have as a basis the *Communist Manifesto*, which has been perverted and betrayed by the

Social-Democracy on two important points: (1) The workers have no country; "national defence" in an imperialist war is a betrayal of socialism; (2) Marx's teaching about the State has been perverted by the Second International.

The term "Social-Democracy" is unscientific, as Marx showed repeatedly, particularly in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in 1875, and as Engels restated in a more popular form, in 1894. Mankind can pass directly from capitalism only into socialism, i. e., into social ownership of the means of production and the distribution of products according to the work of the individual. Our Party looks farther ahead than that: Socialism is bound sooner or later to ripen into Communism, whose banner bears the motto: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

Thus the two names which had in the past served to identify the same modern scientific Socialist movement, became the distinguishing labels of two divergent tendencies, and finally two definitely organized movements within the working class. The Communist movement continued and developed the original teachings of Marx and Engels; that is, the conquest of power by the workers, and the transformation of society to the basis of socialism. The self-styled Socialist movement boldly took the road of struggle *against* the socialist revolution and for the restoration of the broken-down capitalist system.

The logical fruits of these two policies, these two divergent paths, are before us today, sixteen years after the organization of this split on a world scale, in the results in the countries where the two antagonistic policies came to power. In Germany the fruit of opportunism is seen in Hitler and the fascist barbarism which is rushing that country deeper into chaos and catastrophe; in Austria the same results came in the fascism of Dolfuss, succeeded by Schussnig. In Russia the fruit of Marxism is seen in the triumphant completion of the foundation of a socialist society, its ever-growing prosperity, and its expanding power and influence in the whole world.

Is it not clear, "puzzled reader," that the Socialist Party, in spite of its name, no longer stands for socialism? Millions of its worker-followers sincerely want and strive for socialism, but their leaders take them in the opposite direction by the use of fraud and force. In every country where the Socialist Party has become a political power it has entered the service of capitalism. The German events only typify the course taken by all Socialist Parties, each in its own country. The differences are only those of detail and not of principle as between the various countries. The Communist Parties in the various countries represent all the organized forces consciously and earnestly striving for socialism. The only socialist system that has ever been established is under the direct leadership of the Communist Party. The Communist Parties of all the world are united into a World Party, the Communist International, in which is hammered out a uniform world policy, adjusted in each country to the peculiarities of the national situation, the historical differences, and the special problems

of the oppressed masses of each country. When our "puzzled reader" get this historical approach to the development of the struggle for socialism, all the seeming contradictions will be dissolved and the relation between the different parties and different programs will settle into their natural relationship; the puzzle will be solved.

Another questioner approaches the same problem by asking:

Is there any difference between Communism and Socialism (not speaking of the two Parties that go by the name Socialist and Communist)? And what is the basic program that has remained constant since the *Communist Manifesto* of 1847?

The basic program of the revolutionary Socialist or Communist movement since 1847 has been the seizure of state power by the working class in alliance with other exploited sections of the population, in order to dispossess the capitalists from their monopoly of the means of production; to make these means of production the common property of the masses, organized in a workers' state; the operation and use of these means of production to the fullest possible extent for the benefit of all the population, distributing the products among individuals according to the work performed.

The terms Socialism and Communism are distinguished from one another as designating two stages of the development of the new society that will supersede the present capitalist system. Socialism is that society just emerging out of capitalism, when the workers gain power and take over the means of production from the capitalists. The new society is operating under the heavy burden of its inheritance from the old capitalist society. It is still suffering from the destructive effects of the struggle for power. It is still operating in a situation where economy does not yet produce sufficient to satisfy all the needs and desires of mankind. A more or less protracted and painful transition period is necessary to set free and expand the productive forces, to heal the wounds inflicted by capitalism, to overcome the inheritance of poverty, ignorance and degradation of the masses, and step by step to eliminate the ages-old division of society into warring classes. Above all, and especially when socialism is being established still in only one or a few countries, surrounded by a hostile capitalist world, it is necessary to continue a relentless struggle against the remnants of the class enemy within the socialist country, and to resist the encroachments of the capitalist countries.

All of these conditions make it necessary that the new socialist society builds itself up and protects itself through a whole series of measures which are to a greater or lesser degree taken over from the old, capitalist society. Thus, the socialist system does not immediately abolish those bourgeois economic forms and categories of money, wages, etc. While these forms are used on the basis of

quite a different foundation, and are therefore filled with quite a different content, still they are definitely transitional in their character. They carry over some features of the old society while laying the foundations for the new. Most important of all, the period of socialism is characterized by the fact that State power is not abolished, but on the contrary is raised to a higher role and effectiveness. While the old State machinery of capitalism is shattered, broken and dispersed, it is substituted by an entirely new and more powerful State, the Soviet Power, rising directly out of the toiling masses. This workers' State not only serves the new ruling class, the workers, as the instrument of defense against all enemies, inner and outer, but at the same time takes over the organization and direction of the whole economic life of the country and monopolizes the economic relations with the rest of the world.

This transitional period to which we give the general name of socialism, leads directly towards the solution of all those problems and antagonisms which make necessary these transitional forms. In the economic field it solves the problems of poverty and scarcity by the full unfoldment of all productive forces of the nation. In the field of class relations within the country, it step by step abolishes the basis of the class struggle, abolishes the foundation of all classes, by transforming all citizens into producers, and by abolishing the differences between city and country through the socialization and mechanization of agriculture. By the example of the superiority of the rising socialist system over decayed, rotting, collapsing capitalism in the other countries, it furnishes the greatest inspiration and encouragement to the workers in other lands to follow a similar path. With the coming to power of the working class in the most important countries of the world, thereby eliminating the threat of imperialist war against the new socialist economy, all the major enemies of the new society will be finally defeated. Then, socialism begins definitely to pass over to that stage of development which we designate as Communism.

The Communist stage of social development comes when the productive forces of all of the decisive areas of the world have been sufficiently developed to furnish plenty and prosperity for the masses of the population and there is no longer the problem of scarcity. It comes when there is no longer the problem of acute class struggles, because the foundations of class division have been abolished long enough to eliminate all exploiters and largely abolish the inherited differences between classes. Communism comes finally when State power throughout the world has so decisively passed into the hands of the workers that there is no longer possible any serious threat of war directed against the new socialist system.

Under such conditions the last vestiges of the old forms inherited from capitalism begin to disappear. In economic life the mechanism

of money disappears and is substituted by direct social exchange of commodities between the various categories and groups of producers. Wages disappear and are substituted by the direct provision of all the necessities of life to the whole population. There are no longer necessary any special material incentives to labor, because the abundance of products guarantees to everyone the fulfillment of all his needs and the full utilization and development of all productive forces has transformed labor from an onerous burden into a joyous privilege. The motto, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," is now the supreme law. All special instruments of coercion have become unnecessary and the State with-

ers away and disappears. The whole society has complete control of all means of existence and of further development. Humanity has, in the immortal phrase of Engels, "merged from the kingdom of necessity into the kingdom of freedom."

This is Communism. This is the goal towards which we are working. The socialist society is for us the necessary transitional stage towards this goal.

(Earl Browder's third article will appear next week. Supplementary questions arising each week will also be answered and readers are invited to send them in. The first group of such questions and answers appear on this page.)

Questions from Readers

ANSWERED BY EARL BROWDER

Question: You speak of the "fundamental struggle of contradictions inherent in capitalism which gave birth to the crisis." What does this mean? What actually caused the crisis here?

Answer: Capitalist economy is organized on the basis of private ownership of the means of production with, however, social operation. Upon the basis of private ownership by a constantly narrowing group of capitalists, the means of production are operated in order to make profit. The profit motive is supreme. The useful character of commodities is secondary. No matter how useful production might be, if it does not produce a profit for the owners, production stops. The profit which is reaped by the capitalist owners is accumulated and reinvested to a great extent in further and more highly developed means of production.

The operation of this system, therefore, inevitably produces two contradictory results; that is, it increases productive capacity while simultaneously limiting the market for the products. This is the fundamental contradiction which gives birth periodically to capitalist crises, to overproduction; that is production beyond the effective market. This periodical, or cyclical, crisis now takes place in the period of the *general crisis* of the whole capitalist system brought about by the operation of the law of "falling profit," elucidated by Marx. The greater accumulation of machinery of production, and consequent displacement of labor per unit product, brings capitalist society to the point where further expansion itself becomes unprofitable, thereby putting an end to normal capitalist accumulation.

This is what Marx and Engels described as the forces of production coming into violent collision with the social-economic relations (private property, production for profit) and which today causes not only a periodical or cyclical crisis but a general paralysis of the whole capitalist system.

Question: You say that "economic planning" and "capitalism" are two utterly opposed and mutually exclusive categories. Why can't there be planning under capitalism, to at least relieve some of the most severe suffering we see around us?

Answer: The answer to this question can be given with a quotation from my speech in debate with George Soule, January 13, 1933:

"It is, of course, entirely correct to say in one sense that the traditional rugged individualism of capitalism has been transformed into its very opposite, the denial of individualism by monopoly. . . . The original individualism (simple competitive capitalism) remains only as a tradition from the days of the rise of capitalism. The transformation of capitalism, however, has not been in the direction

of carefully transforming it into its opposite in the sense of a planned society, but in organizing all of its contradictions on a higher plane. Thereby it intensifies all of its contradictions within capitalist society and brings closer by these very steps (growth of gigantic trusts, monopolies and all other forms of organization within the capitalist system) not a planned economy but a catastrophic collapse of the present society.

"Of course, capitalism does lots of planning. I happened to see in The Philadelphia Ledger today one of the latest plans. It is a new plan for feeding the masses of unemployed in the state of Pennsylvania. The purpose of this plan is to abolish cash relief and substitute planned distribution of food by the state directly to the unemployed. The motive behind this plan of direct feeding and substitution of food for cash relief is to cut the cost of relief. Of this kind of plan, of course, we have a tremendous and growing crop. That is one kind of capitalist planning.

"There are very important phases of capitalist planning that have to do with production. These are generally summed up under the heading of 'scientific management.' All plans that come under this head are merely phases of the growth of the productive forces and by no means make any contribution whatever to overcoming those fundamental clashes and contradictions that exist under capitalism, that bring about crises and catastrophes such as the present. On the contrary, it was precisely the achievements of this kind of capitalist planning that brought the present crisis to its tremendous depth and duration.

"There is another kind of capitalist planning! Capitalists make plans for crisis itself. We have the allotment plan of Mr. Roosevelt and the Democratic Party (which later became the Triple A). . . . This is planning! Yes, but it is the planning of economic suicide! It is the planning of a society in decay and in collapse, and, further, it is the kind of plan which will not postpone this collapse but will hasten it and make the catastrophe even deeper. This kind of planning is possible for capitalism. However, it is not taking us step by step toward a future economy except in the sense that

it is taking us toward a catastrophic collapse out of the ruins of which will arise a planned economy.

"No one concerned with capitalist planning even pretends to hope to overcome the basic contradictions of capitalist society which render a planned economy impossible. The basic factor of capitalist society is private ownership of the means of production on the basis of which is established a class differentiation of capitalists and workers. This division of society into two basic classes, in which a small parasitic class controls the basic instruments of society, renders futile all attempts to establish a planned economy; renders impossible mass participation in a planned economy; creates the kind of society that destroys its own markets; which generates forces of civil disturbances in its very midst."

To further concretely demonstrate, in terms of current questions, what we mean by contradictions within the capitalist society, let me quote a paragraph from my report to the Eighth Convention of the Communist Party, April 2, 1934:

"All capitalist contradictions are embodied in Roosevelt's 'New Deal' policies. Roosevelt promises to feed the hungry—by reducing the production of food. He promises to redistribute wealth—by billions of subsidies to the banks and corporations. He gives help to the 'forgotten' man—by speeding up the process of monopoly and trustification. He would increase the purchasing power of the masses—through inflation which gives them a dollar worth only 60 cents. He drives the Wall Street money changers out of the temple of government—by giving them complete power in the administration of the government machinery of the industrial codes. He gives the workers the right of organization—by legalizing the company unions. He inaugurates a regime of economy—by shifting the tax burden to the consuming masses, by cutting appropriations for wages, veterans and social services—while increasing the war budget a billion dollars, and giving ten billions to those who already own everything. He restores the faith of the masses in democracy—by beginning the introduction of fascism. He works for international peace—by launching the sharpest trade and currency war in history."

Question: You say the Communist International predicted the crisis in America? Hadn't the C. I. been predicting the crisis for many years back, in the same way it has been predicting a new world war for years?

Answer: It is not true that the Communists have been simply predicting a crisis for many years, waiting for the crisis finally to come to prove that we were right all the time.

The Communists were the first to point out, in 1921, that the first post-war crisis of capitalism had been overcome and that the capitalist society had reached a certain relative, though precarious, stabilization. It is true that the Communists have always emphasized the *relative* and *precarious* nature of this stabilization. It is true that we always pointed out that this stabilization must end in a new crisis. It was only in 1928, however, at the Sixth World Congress, that the Communists proclaimed the closely approaching end of this relative stabilization; it was only at the Thirteenth Plenum, December, 1933, that the Communists finally declared that the world had entered into the new period of revolutions and wars, marking the *complete disappearance of relative stabilization*. Specifically, in relation to the American crisis, the Communist International and the Communist Party of the United States did not predict a quick outbreak of the crisis until the end of 1928 and during the ten months of 1929 leading up to the great Wall Street crash.

Next Week Earl Browder Writes on

"WHO WILL LEAD THE REVOLUTION?"

Third Article in His Series, "What Is Communism?"