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On Church, Home and Violence *

Mr. Browder, we have heard a great deal of Communists advocating the overthrow of the United States government by force. I think it will clarify the situation greatly were you to tell us just what the stand of your Party is on that particular question.

The Communist Party does not advocate force and violence. It is a legal party and defends its legality. Communists are not conspirators, not terrorists, not anarchists. The Communist Party is an open revolutionary party, continuing under modern conditions the revolutionary traditions of 1776.

Just how do you find a basis of comparison between those conditions and the year 1936?

America was born as an independent nation out of a conflict that arose between the interests of the masses of the people on one side and the then existing government on the other side. The Declaration of Independence laid down the fundamental revolutionary principle that when such a conflict arises the people have the right and the duty to establish a new form of government to guarantee their future security. We Communists maintain the Declaration of Independence today. We do not, however, make the issue of a new form of government the question to be decided in the 1936 elections. We know that the overwhelming majority of the American people are not prepared to choose a new form of government.

* A radio interview given by Earl Browder, in Hartford, Conn., on October 6, 1936. The questioner was Cedric W. Foster, newspaperman in charge of public relations for station WHTT which carried the interview.—Ed.

Just what do you make as the issue in the election four weeks from now, and just what do you think the American people are prepared to do if they are not ready to choose a new form of government?

We say the chief issue is the choice between progress and reaction, between democracy or fascism. We believe the great majority of the American people are prepared to accept a definitely progressive platform based upon protection and extension of democratic rights. Unfortunately this majority is not yet organized for political action. It has been trying unsuccessfully to get the progressive platform adopted by one or other of the old parties. Today these people are turning toward the formation of a new party which in most places takes the form of the Farmer-Labor Party.

Well, doesn't this constitute an abandonment by the Communist Party of the revolutionary principles to which it has always adhered?

No, the Communists systematically advocate their revolutionary principles, that is, the necessity of socialism to replace the present capitalist system. But until that becomes a practical issue for the majority of the people, the Communists will join hands with all of those who fight for a better life under capitalism. The improvement of living conditions under capitalism may delay the revolutionary change to socialism but it will provide a more peaceful, less difficult and less painful transition to socialism when the time comes.

With all this talk of socialism creeping in here, Mr. Browder, why don't you join hands with Norman Thomas and have one party, a combination of Socialists and Communists?

That's a good idea and we proposed that to Norman Thomas.

What was his reaction?

Norman Thomas rejected the idea of uniting the forces that want socialism. He goes farther and refuses to help build the Farmer-Labor Party to unite all of those who want to

stop reaction and fascism. Norman Thomas says the issue in 1936 is the choice between socialism or capitalism. He's not interested unless he can get socialism right away. Norman Thomas has even said that it might be better if Landon, the extreme reactionary, were elected.

Well, then, please tell me briefly just what is the difference between your beliefs and those of Mr. Thomas, if there is any difference.

In the immediate issues of the day our main difference with Thomas is that we stand for a united front of all the progressives while Thomas rejects that idea. On the question of the future socialistic society our difference is chiefly that Thomas thinks that socialism can be established without a revolution.

May I interpose here, Mr. Browder. When you say revolution do you mean the generally accredited definition of that term which is war, bloodshed and suffering or do you mean an education revolution accomplished at the polls?

We have no different definition of revolution than that given to us by Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson pointed out that the bloody war of 1776, which was necessary to establish American independence, was not caused by advocacy of force and violence by the patriots of those days but by the determination of a government which was separated from the people to impose its will at all costs. So long as the people can control their government there will be no necessity for a bloody revolution. If the capitalists would submit to the decisions of the American people the change to socialism will be bloodless.

In other words Communistic principles do not advocate the waving of a red rag in the streets and machine guns mowing down the populace and that, Mr. Browder, I am frank to confess is just what many people believe.

It is through just such an interview as this, Mr. Foster,

that we are trying to break down that belief. We Communists want to prevent a continuance of the violence that shames American life. Machine guns are not strangers to American streets, but it has never been the Communists that have brought them out. It is usually the strike-breaking agencies employed by the capitalists which have made machine guns and gas bombs commonplace experiences to large numbers of the American people. We would like to stop all that. If the employers further develop this kind of warfare upon the American working people, they are the ones who are forcing the issue.

There is another question I want to ask you, Mr. Browder. It has to do with religion. According to press reports most of the churches in Russia have been demolished under a Communist regime. Do you believe that religion is not necessary for the welfare of mankind, and if you do not believe that how do you justify the demolition of the churches?

The Communists stand for unconditional freedom of worship. The reason why the church in Russia suffered from the revolution is because it was a state church bound up with the old tsarist regime of oppression which was a by-word throughout the world. It was a political instrument of the tsarist autocracy and when the Tsar was overthrown it tried to re-establish tsarism. Similarly, in Spain today, the church is suffering because it made itself the center of an organized rebellion to overthrow the democratic republic and its buildings were made into arsenals for the fascist rebels. When the church enters politics in this way the church will always suffer. If the church separates itself from the state and confines itself to its proper sphere of religion it will have nothing to complain of anywhere.

The Soviet Union divorced the church from the state and established the American system in these relations. We Communists, in general, are not adherents of any church; in this respect we follow the examples of Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Paine.

Speaking of divorcing church from state, Mr. Browder, brings up the subject to my mind of marriage and divorce. I believe it was Theodore Roosevelt who said, "When the home disintegrates the nation decays." Don't you believe that the case with which divorce is obtained in Russia tends to lower the moral standards of the people? I don't believe you advocate such a lowering of standards?

Roosevelt was correct. One of the signs of decay in American capitalist society is the tragic break-up of millions of homes which is going on under the blows of unemployment. All of the immediate measures proposed by the Communists are aimed to protect the home. We do not think that the home can be maintained, however, by making divorce more difficult. The proper way is to create conditions under which people won't want divorces. Permanent and healthy family life is best built upon the secure possession by all people of the material basis for the family; that is, adequate housing, plenty of food and clothing, and an assured income. It is still true very often that when poverty walks in through the door love flies out of the window. Abolish poverty and the problem of divorce will largely disappear.

Well, that seems to settle that, Mr. Browder. While we are on the subject of Russia I want to ask you another question. It has always been my belief that when any group of individuals, be they Communists or any other party adherents, come into power, they may forget they represent the common every-day man and woman and seek avariciously for more and more power. In other words, there enters the human element. Do you as a Communist claim your Party leaders immune from such lust for power that they will always remember the people whom they serve? Might they not fall into the category of the persons you term capitalists and whom you oppose?

We Communists are the last ones to deny the human element in all social problems. That is why we consider it so important that the working class shall be represented by a highly or-

ganized party which sets exemplary standards for its leadership and enforces these standards ruthlessly. Without such systematic and organized control of the leadership, through a party arising directly from the mass of the people and controlled by them, it is quite true that leadership tends to degenerate. This is especially true under conditions of capitalism which sets as the highest standard for each individual, not the service of the general good, but the accumulation of individual wealth. We do *not think* this is a permanent characteristic of human nature. This is only a product of the individualistic capitalist society. A deeper feature of human nature is the desire to win the esteem of one's fellows. When this esteem can be secured only by serving the common good, then human nature will flower as never before in history. The individual will find his greatest good in the common service.

In closing this interview, Mr. Browder, will you sum up briefly the aims of the Communist Party and what it stands for in the 1936 elections?

The Communist Party in the present election strives first of all to unite all the progressive forces in the country in a Farmer-Labor Party with a program which calls for the provision of jobs and a minimum wage for all; social security for those who cannot work through old-age pensions and unemployment insurance; guaranteed opportunity for education and work for the young people; security for the farmer in the possession of his farm and an adequate income; maintenance and extension of democratic rights and popular control of the government; a system of public finance based upon ability to pay, that is, taxation of the rich, with abolition of sales taxes; complete equality for the Negro people by the enforcement of the Constitution, and a peace policy to keep America out of war by keeping war out of the world. This platform can be summed up as a program of democracy against fascism, of progress against reaction. It can be accomplished through organizing the people in a Farmer-Labor Party. The experience in fighting for these demands, will, we believe, convince the

majority of the people at some future time that it is necessary and possible to go forward to a new system of society which we call socialism. Socialism is that system whereby the people take over as their common property the basic economy of the country and operate it through their people's government for the benefit of the whole population. These, Mr. Foster, are our immediate and ultimate aims, and these are the principles for which we are struggling.