

# Unemployment and Vulgar "Marxism"

by Vera Buch

We publish below the concluding instalment of Comrade Buch's article in criticism of Browder's pamphlet "Out of Work." It will be clear to every reader of our paper that the viewpoint expressed in this article on several questions is not in full agreement with the viewpoint of the CP-Majority Group.

We come now to the second variety of unemployment distinguished by Browder. This is: "Permanent unemployment caused by rationalization."

"Permanent unemployment has grown up especially in the last ten years as the result of new capitalist methods in the mills and factories. These new capitalist methods are called by the general name of rationalization, that is, reorganization production along 'rational' lines. But the 'rational' ideas of the capitalist run in a direction that is very 'irrational' for the workers—for they mean the development of new methods of getting more work out of each worker in a day or an hour. They are the methods of speed-up, of stretch-out, and all the other forms of making every worker work harder and faster. Each worker is made to keep up with a faster machine, or he is given more machines to tend, or both. That is the meaning of capitalist rationalization which has been the outstanding new development of capitalism in the last ten years."

Here ends Browder's economic analysis. According to this paragraph, in the last ten years the capitalists suddenly became smart, reorganized their production, introduced the speed-up and as a result unemployment has now become permanent.

The first error here is to identify rationalization too much with speed-up. It is true that the speed-up and stretch-out

are the forms of rationalization which affect the workers most grievously, hence it is correct to emphasize them. It is true too that we cannot expect here an analysis of all the many forms of rationalization. But if rationalization is the cause of permanent unemployment, then our major fight should be against rationalization, not against capitalism. In no way does Browder show that rationalization is an inevitable outgrowth of capitalism. According to him, it is something new which just happened in the last ten years. Remove this new objectionable feature of capitalism and all will be well. Thus he falls here into the worst reformist-liberal position of idealizing the past of capitalism and of attacking new outgrowths of capitalism instead of capitalism itself.

But his real error here—and this is the third major error of this pamphlet—lies in believing that rationalization is the cause of permanent unemployment. Rationalization is itself a product of the inherent forces and tendencies of capitalism just as much as unemployment is. Since the world war, the great restriction of markets, side by side with the enormous growth of productive forces, has forced the capitalists to rationalize their production, in other words, to apply scientific methods in the struggle to maintain their profits. Of course this is done at the expense of the working class. Any one can see that speed-up, mechan-

ization, and other forms of capitalist rationalization displace workers. But a Communist theoretician must not subject his theory to the first apparent phenomenon losing sight of underlying causes. This indeed constitutes a vulgarization of theory.

Capitalist rationalization, while not the primary cause of unemployment, has nevertheless greatly magnified the unemployment problem. It has intensified the exploitation of the employed, and has increased to vast proportions the permanent army of the unemployed, which is further increased today by the economic crisis.

The fundamental cause of unemployment lies in the necessary process of growth of productive forces under the capitalist mode of production. As capital expands, the tendency is for more and more of it to be invested in machinery and other means of production, and less and less in wages. That is, the organic composition of capital increases; constant capital increases at the expense of variable. The improvement of machinery constantly increase the productivity of labor. Hence less and less employment of labor is necessary for a given quantity of goods. So the industrial reserve army is created. Its basis is the workers thrown out of industry by increased productivity. Peasants who are forced to give up their land and other ruined petty-bourgeois, help to swell its numbers.

And this reserve army, or unemployed army, becomes in turn a necessary condition of capitalist development. Capitalist production develops unevenly, with periods or cycles of expansion ("prosperity") and contraction ("depression" or "crisis"), spreading out and contracting now in one place, now in another, now in this industry, now in that. The industrial reserve army must be present at all times to fill in the gaps. In times of crisis the reserve army greatly increases. In times of "prosperity" it is partly absorbed. At all times it serves to exert pressure on the employed to worsen their conditions.

In previous periods of capitalism, the actual number of workers was increasing in spite of the process of throwing workers out of the factories. Markets were then expanding, thus affording a safety valve for the growing production forces. Today the actual numbers of workers in industry in America is beginning to decrease notwithstanding increased production. Furthermore, the limit of markets has been reached—thus the contradictions today are reaching the exploding point.

With an erroneous and confused economic basis, we expect further errors when Browder enters the political and tactical fields. And our expectations are fully justified.

On page 20 we find the following statement: "And capitalism can only be abolished by the working class, organizing its power in strong, fighting trade unions, under the leadership of the Communist Party, and overthrowing the state power of the capitalist class to replace it with a workers' government—the dictatorship of the proletariat, the rule of the propertyless people." Two major errors must be pointed out here. First, the statement that only by organizing its power in strong, fighting trade unions, under the leadership of the Communist Party, can the workers overthrow capitalism. Were this statement true, what about countries where the fascist rule of capitalism smashes all trade union organization in the period before the seizure of power? What about colonial countries with an overwhelming majority of peasant population, where the trade unions cannot be otherwise than small and weak? Must these countries abandon all hope of revolution? And does Earl Browder imagine that the Russian workers before 1917 had such "strong, fighting trade unions?" It is a well-known fact that the Russian unions could exist only illegally, on a small, scattered basis. But Browder will not deny that the Russian workers nevertheless managed to overthrow the Czarist state and replace it with a workers and farmers government.

The fact is that the revolutionary struggle develops upon many different fronts prior to the seizure of power, and the trade union struggle is one of many important phases of struggle. This Comrade Lenin in his struggle against the economists many times pointed out.

Witness the following paragraph (*What Is To Be Done*, by V. I. Lenin—"The Iskra Period," Book II, p. 140.):

"Is it true, that, in general, the economic struggle is the most widely applicable method of drawing the masses into the political struggle? It is absolutely untrue. All and sundry manifestations of police tyranny and autocratic outrage, in addition to the evils connected with the economic struggle, are equally widely applicable as a means of drawing in the masses. The tyranny of the Zemstvo chiefs, the flogging of the peasantry, the corruption of the officials, the conduct of the police towards the common people in the cities, the fight against the famine-stricken and the suppression of the popular striving towards enlightenment and knowledge, the extortion of taxes, the persecution of the religious sects, the severe discipline in the army, the militarist conduct towards the students and the liberal intelligentsia—all these and a thousand other similar manifestations of tyranny, tho not directly connected with the economic struggle, do they, in general, represent a less widely applicable method and subject for political agitation and for drawing the masses into the political struggle? The very opposite is the case. . ."

Applying this analysis and the principles contained in it to American conditions, Browder might have mentioned the oppression of the Negroes, the distress of the farmers, the discrimination against the foreign born, unemployment, the discontent in the army, the high cost of living, as some of many conditions on the basis of which revolutionary struggle may be developed, and one of which may even become, at the proper moment, under the leadership of the Communist Party, the fulcrum of revolt which may be used for the seizure of power.

In his description of the economic achievements of the workers in the Soviet Union (page 21) Browder breathes no hint as to how these achievements were brought about, namely by centralized control of production by the workers' state, in distinction to the anarchy of production in capitalist society.

Nor does he breathe a hint as to the danger of armed attack against the Soviet Union, at a time when such danger has become very pressing. Furthermore, the danger of an approaching imperialist war in general is mentioned by him only in the most casual way (in connection with Hoover's unemployment conference, page 19). It is not given the least emphasis nor the least explanation. Why Browder writing a book on the war danger I suppose he would discuss the war danger. This being a book on unemployment he evidently feels he must confine himself to unemployment. But to a Marxian subjects are not academically separate like the course of a Kansas City law correspondence course. Especially in a pamphlet on unemployment should one discuss the war danger—not merely because it is an urgent subject today but because the same contradictions of capitalist society which produce unemployment are urging towards war. Browder speaks of the struggle for markets, but he has no word for the menace of world war with which this struggle is pregnant.

We come now to the final point. Speaking of his thirteenth demand for the unemployed, namely recognition of the Soviet Union, Browder says: (pg. 25.) "This is a central political demand of the working class, and would also alleviate unemployment thru the development of increased volume of trade, which the Soviet Union would place in the U. S. if normal relations were established."

Let us first clarify his economic base. Economically speaking he must mean either of two things either the U. S. is to produce commodities needed for trade with the Soviet Union if the latter be recognized, or else it is to dispose of the accumulated commodities already produced. In the latter case, employment could only be furnished to workers employed in shipping, a mere drop in the bucket of the total unemployed. And if he means new production, then he is looking to the cause of the sickness to cure it. Since over production is at the root of the present crisis, then more production can only aggravate the crisis. The astonishing thing is that Browder himself in this very pamphlet points out (pg. 15-16) that Hoover's recommendation of

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its materials from the ends of the earth and to the ends of the earth it sends its products. Such raw materials as oil, coal, iron, copper etc. are sought for by huge trusts. To grab up the places where they are found, it is necessary for these trusts to get concessions, control governments, drive out rivals. Such giants as the Standard Oil and the Shell Company are wrestling for control of the oil of the entire globe. Their conflict ranges from Persia to India to Peru and Mexico. The conflict culminates inevitably in war.

5. **Struggle for control of communications and transport.** Every big imperialist system is held together by rail, ocean and radio-telegraph communication. Every dream of world empire involves the attempt to build up a connecting "nerve-system" on a continental or world scale. Thus there was the Moscow-Port Arthur Railway which precipitated the Russo-Japanese War; The Berlin-Bagdad Railway scheme of Germany which contributed to the outbreak of the war of 1914-18. The British railway scheme from Cairo to the Cape. The American New York-to-Buenos Aires Railway, more than two-thirds completed and already superseded by the New York-to-Buenos Aires Airways. There is the struggle for control of the Mediterranean between France, Italy and England.

Then there is the Suez Canal which links Britain with India and China and enables Great Britain to throw its Atlantic Fleet into the Pacific. Because of the desire to control the approaches to Suez, England holds Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, tightens its hold on Egypt and the Sudan, and Lord Balfour becomes a "Zionist" so that Zionism can be used to set up a buffer state against the Arabs just above the Canal.

Similarly there is the Panama Canal which makes the United States a Pacific Power because it enables the union of the Atlantic with the Pacific fleet. In order, primarily, to control the approaches to the Panama Canal, the United States has intervened 30 times in the last generation in the countries of Central America and the Caribbean.

Next there is the gigantic struggle for control of the cables under the sea and the ether waves in the air, between Great Britain and the United States.

And finally there is the struggle for the control of the sea.

6. **Wars on colonies and to enslave less "developed" sections of the earth.** Such are

the wars that England wages on India; America on the Latin-American Countries; the various imperialist powers on China. Brutal wars for the right to rob, to reduce free countries to colonial states and to keep colonies in continued subjection. From the standpoint of the colonial country, these wars are struggles for freedom; from the standpoint of the imperialist powers struggles for enslavement and pillage. Bourgeois writers usually do not call them wars at all. England is merely "restoring order" in India. The United States is just "aiding the Haitians to govern themselves". And so on. Such is the hypocrisy of imperialist apologetics!

The reader will notice that none of the familiar "causes" of war as advanced by capitalist governments to fool their people, are in the above list. There is nothing about "war to end all war", "make the world safe for democracy", "defend national honor", "save civilization or kultur", "repel the invader", defend the hearth and home" or any of the false slogans with which the big imperialist powers each sought to camouflage their struggles for lands, markets, colonies, investments, raw materials, and the right to rob, enslave and exploit.

Nor is there any such fairy story explanation of war as the one involved in the explanation that "the other fellow started it." All the imperialist powers are preparing for war. The very imperialist system makes this inevitable. When war comes each country will seek to prove that "the other fellow started it." In the late war each country "proved" that it was on the defensive and the enemy was the aggressor. That is one of the reasons why there is so much "peace" talk and "peace" maneuvering as a new war approaches; and all the big capitalist powers arm to the teeth while they talk disarmament, and prepare for a new blood bath while they elaborate Kellogg Pacts.

In the next article we will examine two of the main sources of conflict that are bringing on another "bigger and better" world war at breakneck speed—the Anglo-American conflict for world supremacy, and the plot of the imperialist powers to make a united attack on the Soviet Union. Article 5 will describe the coming war—"improvements" in tanks, gases, poisons, bombing planes and the "civilized" technique of mass murder. And Article 6 will take up the various methods proposed to prevent and abolish war.

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a "new drive for foreign markets" to relieve unemployment would "simply increase the forces which have produced the crisis." And on the heels of this Browder makes the very same recommendation for the very same reason. He might have said: "Trade with the Soviet Union is needed by the Soviet Union itself in order to build up its economy. And that building up the Soviet Union means striking a blow at capitalism and strengthening the workers' cause thruout the world." But no, he does not say this, he says that the reason for demanding recognition is that increased trade will alleviate unemployment.

Such a position supposes, furthermore, that unemployment can be received within the confines of the capitalist system. Again Browder falls into the reformist position of attacking the partial manifestation, not capitalism itself. And again in this passage, we must point out, that not a word is said about the attacks against the Soviet Union, not a word for the defense of the Soviet Union against imperialist war. But no wonder, since Browder considers the "normal" relationship to be that of recognition, with Socialist and capitalist countries existing peacefully side by side. He seems to see not at all the bitter, irreconcilable conflict which ultimately must tear the world in two.

In conclusion we can only say that this pamphlet is written by one of the fore-

and progressive workers.

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most "leaders" of the C.P.U.S.A., and that it has evoked no criticism either from other leaders of the Party nor from circles higher up. We can only appeal to the Party membership to investigate further into the situation in the Party and the Comintern which permits this swamp of opportunism to exist unchallenged, and this ignorance to pass for leadership.