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About Browder's "Out of Work"

Unemployment and Vulgar "Marxism"

by Vera Buch

A popular pamphlet on unemployment giving the workers a Marxian analysis in simple language, would fill a real need in the present situation. Evidently this is the sort of pamphlet which Earl Browder wished to produce in his *Out of a Job*. But it is no Marxian analysis which Browder gives; it is a confused mixture of syndicalist misconceptions and liberal illusions. *Out of a Job* does not popularize Marxism, but vulgarizes it.

Browder's economic "analysis" distinguishes two kinds of unemployment; "cyclical," caused by crises of capitalist production, and "permanent," which, according to him, is a new development of the last ten years, caused by rationalization. Outside of a few phrases without explanation such as "unemployment is permanent" (page 5), "Capitalism is built upon unemployment and reproduces unemployment upon a mass scale" (page 10), in no place in the pamphlet is there an analysis of the real cause of unemployment.

"In the early days of capitalist development," says Browder (Page 4) "unemployment was slight in 'good times' or 'prosperity' and became serious, large-scale unemployment only during 'bad times', or 'depression', times of crisis." Marx has plainly pointed out that the formation of the industrial reserve army was impossible in the really early days of capitalist production since then the composition of capital changed but very slowly, and with its accumulation there kept pace, on the whole, a corresponding growth in the demand for labor.

Now take the following paragraph (page 10):

"Capitalism begins with unemployment. Capitalism cannot arise until there has first been created a large body of propertyless persons, who have no land or other means of living. Propertyless persons are called proletarians and as a class are the proletariat. The existence of unemployed proletariat is the first condition for the beginning of capitalism."

What Browder is trying to describe in these vague confused sentences is the expropriation of the peasantry, the driving of the farmers off their land, which took place in England and Western Europe during the 15th and 16th and even during the 17th centuries during the transition between feudalism and capitalism.

But where does the "unemployed proletariat" come in which Browder claims is the "first condition for the beginning of capitalism"? The peasants who got work in the factories were certainly not the unemployed. And those who were expropriated and could not get work became beggars and thieves, not proletarians and were a tremendous source of embarrassment to the state authorities. They were victims whose horrible fate testified mutely even at that early day to the ruthless bloody nature of the capitalist monster then in its babyhood.

But now we come to the real source of

Browder's confusion here. He does not know what a proletarian is! Here is his definition: "Propertyless persons (persons, mind you!) are called proletarians, and as a class are the proletariat." Who are these propertyless persons who as a class are the proletariat? Capitalist society teems with "persons" without property. There are great numbers of professional people, teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc. who do not own property. There are swarms of beggars, burglars, gunmen, prostitutes and other inhabitants of the underworld who do not own property. Public hospitals are full of propertyless persons. So are insane asylums. Children and youths do not as a rule own property. There are hundreds of thousands of tenant and share-crop farmers who do not own property. And there are finally the agricultural and industrial workers, the wage workers. According to Earl Browder, all this great heterogeneous mass makes up the proletariat. A true anarcho-liberal conception. There is only one Marxian definition of a proletarian. A proletarian is a wage worker.

What should have been said in this paragraph is that capitalism had to have as its foundation a body of free laborers—free in the double sense that they were not chattel slaves, were not bound either to land or lord, and also that they owned no means of production—and hence had to sell their labor-power to the capitalists who owned the means of production (the factories, machines, etc.) The expropriated peasants who went into the factories became the industrial proletariat. Those who did not become, not proletarians, but beggars and thieves.

He continues: "The workers must produce a surplus over and above their wages, or else the capitalist will shut down his factory and throw the proletariat into the streets without a job."

Apparently Earl Browder actually believes that if five or six million workers in the U. S. today are unemployed it is because they did not produce a surplus while working. Here is Browder's second big error. He does not know this fundamental Marxian concept, that the workers must produce surplus-value while working. The occasion when the surplus labor-time of workers is reduced to zero is one practically never occurring. What then actually happens in times of industrial crisis? As far as the individual capitalist is concerned, he finds his orders falling off, his products piling up on his hands. Then he lays off some of his workers. Because they were not producing surplus? No! Because they were producing too much. The normal capitalist crisis is one of over-production combined with a restricted market, with low consumptive power of the masses. The capitalist cannot realize his profit because he cannot sell his goods. But the surplus value is there, produced by the workers and remaining "congealed" as Marx puts it, in the goods which the capitalist has on his hands.

Two Miners'

by Frank Vratario

THE UMWA TRIDISTRICT CONVENTION

The Hazleton Tri-District Convention of the United Mine Workers of America, which began on May 2, was opened with the usual blessing by a priest. During the convention and after, there were politicians conferring with the leaders and prominent delegates, trying to persuade them for this or that candidate in the primary elections. In order to protect himself against any rank and file opposition and so as to be able to knock them down whenever he wanted, Lewis got strong-arm protection, including detectives. Here is what one of their own papers said about it:

"Daniel T. McKelvey, popular Hazleton detective and champion lobbyist, is on hand looking after the cares and needs of the delegates. Dan is a popular gent."

The first day of the convention passed with speeches and the appointment of the different committees. The second day the Scale Committee gave their report, calling for a continuation of the present agreement for a number of years. We didn't expect anything else from the Lewis officialdom—in view of the fact that the present agreement means wage cuts and the Lewis officialdom is for it.

But here the Lewis-Kennedy-Boylan crew met with strong opposition. Tho unorganized, this opposition was very strong and gave a big blow to the Lewis-Boylan officialdom.

At the Convention there were the professional supporters of the Lewis machine but there were also old experienced

The capitalist is thus glutted with products containing surplus value, but because they were producing too much of it.

Let us follow this error of Browder's to some logical conclusions. It leads directly to class collaboration. If Browder believes what he writes here, he should advise workers: "Work harder to produce a surplus and you will keep your jobs." Exactly the arguments of the A. F. of L., the SP and numberless liberal elements. And exactly, too, the arguments of the employers who fire their workers because "they are not making anything on them." And exactly, too, the argument to win over the worker to sympathy with the boss because the boss, too, is losing. As Marx puts it (Capital, vol. iii, page 271): "The vulgar economist does practically no more than to translate the queer concepts of the capitalists, who are in the thralls of competition, into a more theoretical and generalizing language and to attempt a vindication of the correctness of these conceptions."

Analyzing further we find Browder headed for another error. He seems to believe that workers work without producing surplus value. Where does the surplus value come from if it is not produced by the workers in the factories? There is only one other place it could come from and that would be from the market, from circulation. This must be the conclusion if we follow Browder's line of thought. And thus he falls into one of the main errors of the vulgar economists against whom Marx polemized sixty years ago.

Even Browder's description of the suffering of the workers under unemployment is insufficient. What is lacking here (pp. 14-15) is any mention of the problems of high rent, high cost of living, lack of social insurance, etc. all of which become greatly intensified in times of unemployment. These problems on the one hand involve the family of the worker, the women and the children, in the class struggle, and on the other engage the working class in the struggle against other sections of the bourgeoisie than the employers themselves, landlords, chain store companies, etc. A struggle for social insurance involves the workers immediately in a struggle against the capitalist state as such. Failure to keep such problems as these always in mind shows above all a syndicalist tendency to see only the struggle in the shops and nothing else.

(Concluded in the next issue)