
Open Letter

from Earl Browder in Yonkers, NY, to the Yonkers Club, CPUSA, Feb. 1, 1946

Second part of the mimeographed pamphlet by Earl Browder, *Appeal of Earl Browder to the National Committee CPUSA Against the Decision of the National Board of February 5th, 1946 for His Expulsion*. n.c. [Yonkers, NY]: n.p. [Earl Browder], n.d. [1946].

Yonkers, New York, Feb. 1, 1946.

To the Yonkers Club and all members of the Communist Party:

You have called me to discuss my relations with the Club, obviously as a result of the public campaign now going on to secure my expulsion from Party membership.

I am informed that a membership meeting of Westchester County, held on January 29 at Mt. Vernon, for the purpose to mobilize support to the strikes now going on, the order of business was interrupted to introduce a resolution by Comrade [Edward S. ?] Hagstom calling for my expulsion. The reasons given, I am informed, were that I had advanced Keynesian ideas, that I have maintained them stubbornly, that I have been politically passive and failed to attend Club meetings. I understand that the motion was rejected by a vote of 64 to 52, but that later on the question was re-opened in order to refer the matter to the Yonkers Club.

This is my first opportunity to answer such charges before the Party membership.

First, as to the charge of political passivity.

It is true that I have conducted no active political work of any kind since the Party Convention last July [1945]. The reason is that, having been summarily removed from all positions of responsibility, I have received no invitation to participate in any from of political activity from the Party leadership. In the absence of any Party directive or suggestion, I hesitated to take any personal initiative on the matter,

knowing that any such move by me would bring charges of factionalism. I wanted the results of the Convention to unfold before the Party without any controversy arising around my own personal involvement.

It is further true that I heard of a proposal by a member of the National Board that I should be given a job scrubbing floors in the National Office. If there had been any evidence that there existed a real need for my services in this capacity, I would gladly have given them. However, since the proposal was rather one of granting pension to a needy but worthless former employee, I did not see fit to take this suggestion seriously.

You must pardon me if I also speak briefly of a difficult personal problem that had to be solved before I could resume systematic political activity. I mention it not in order to complain, but only to answer irresponsible slanders being spread against me. After fifteen years as Party spokesman, I was faced with the necessity, rather suddenly and unexpectedly, to find private employment in order to support my family. But all normal private employment is closed to me by the newspaper notoriety which attaches to my person, and which I find it impossible to escape. Since the July Convention, furthermore, all normal employment in the labor movement is rendered impossible for me, because the Party leadership keeps my name before the world as a synonym for everything undesirable. It required some time for me to find my way through these barbed-wire entanglements, and to secure employment which was compatible with the maintenance of personal integrity. I am now employed in writing economic analysis for a very limited list of subscribers, all of whom are persons who support the same Roosevelt program to which our Party is committed by its Convention Resolution. I mention this matter only because it has been made the basis of the most vile and slandering gossip campaign against me.

Second, my non attendance at Club meetings.

In September [1945] I formally requested my membership transfer to the Yonkers Club. For reasons unknown to me, this transfer was delayed until December, when I received my registration and a new 1946 membership card from the Yonkers Club. I had previously suggested to Comrade Bob Thompson, in my presence of the National Secretariat, that for some few months at least my attendance in the Club might become a disturbing factor in its work rather than a help,

and that I should be excused from attendance until a decision should be arrived at that this condition had ended. Thompson expressed his agreement, and the other members of the Secretariat did not express any disagreement. I was later informed by members of the Yonkers Club Executive that this proposal had been agreed upon.

In view of these facts, it is beyond my comprehension how the non-attendance at Club meetings during December and January can be the basis of a challenge to my Party membership and a motion for my expulsion. Quite aside from the special circumstances of my position, if the Party followed the practice of expelling those who absent themselves from Club meetings for two months, there would be an exceptional crisis in Party membership.

Third, the charge that I have advanced Keynesian ideas and maintained them stubbornly.

This charge is entirely false.

The first time I ever heard or saw my name connected with that of Keynes was in the article by Comrade Foster in *The Worker* of January 20, less than two weeks ago. Evidently it is a new discovery, and would merit much more careful examination than there has been time for, before it could properly be made the basis of charges for expulsion, even if it could be established that in my past writings there could be found some points of similarity or agreement with Keynes. It is a well-known fact that even Lenin found many points of agreement with bourgeois writers on imperialism, particularly Hobson, and even with flagrant apologists for imperialism when they were dealing with the establishment of objective facts and not of basic theory. I am myself still not sufficiently acquainted with Keynes' writings to pass upon the question definitively as to the nature of the supposed agreement between myself and Keynes (in connection with my *past* writings), but no charges affecting my membership in the Party can properly be based upon anything except what I have written or said before the Party and the public *since the July Convention*.

I must emphatically dispute the charge that I have advanced and stubbornly maintained any ideas whatsoever, either Keynesian or otherwise, since the last Party Convention, except the decisions of that Convention.

Fourth, it is a fact thoroughly established in the record that I accepted the decisions of the Party Convention, not only technically

but politically, and that I have not spoken or acted in any way contrary to those decisions.

I was present at the last Party Convention and sat through all its political discussions and decisions, though as a guest, not a delegate. By courtesy of the Convention I was permitted to speak for about one hour. That speech was the last time I have put any developed ideas before the Party and defended them, whether stubbornly or otherwise. The contents of this speech are, of course, unknown to you or to anyone except those present in the Convention, because it was never given to the membership in any form.

Up until the moment when the Party Convention adopted its political resolution, I was defending policies which had been adopted unanimously in previous Party Conventions, and I was defending the whole record of the Party, which I consider an admirable record — especially for the year 1944 and the closing phase of the war, quite regardless of any incidental errors. That was not only my right as a Party member, it was my inescapable duty as a Party leader.

When the Convention adopted its political resolution, I declared to the Convention my unconditional subordination to its decisions. Furthermore, I addressed a letter to the Presiding Committee of this Convention, establishing in the record my belief that the Convention Resolution did not contain any of those ideas which I had condemned as revisionism (in my article in the discussion and in my speech to the Convention), and that on the contrary it represented a rallying of the Marxist core of the Party, and that I accepted it as the Party line.

I have never departed from that position. I have never appealed against the Convention decisions or opposed them in any way. I have accepted my own personal position as a rank-and-file Party member, and will be fully satisfied to remain in that status. I consider the issues of the Convention closed with its adjournment, except insofar as they have a scientific, international, theoretical character which makes them subject to continuous investigation and discussion throughout the whole world.

In conclusion, therefore, on the question of the demand for my expulsion from membership in the Party, I submit that it is proved: (a) that any political ideas I have publicly advanced and stubbornly maintained were, when so advanced and maintained, the unanimously adopted views of the Party as a whole. No challenge to my

Party membership can be based upon them; (b) since the Convention that made such drastic changes in the Party, I have not advanced any ideas of my own before the Party at all, and therefore no charges can be maintained upon the basis of what somewhat may imagine are my views; (c) the condition of political inactivity and non-attendance at Club meetings, which it is sought to make a basis for expulsion, was imposed upon me by factors outside of my control, and in part (Club attendance) by agreement with local and national Party leadership, and therefore not a valid ground for expulsion — even if such charges could be valid in cases where the condition of inactivity was voluntary, which has not be an established custom and tradition in our Party.

Therefore, I ask the membership of the Yonkers Club to reject the charges brought against me, and to confirm my membership in the Communist Party.

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The conditions which caused me to be politically inactive since last July are rapidly ceasing to be operative. I expect in the future to resume political activity, to the extent that I am permitted, both within the Party and publicly. Especially I hope to be able to make a contribution to the victory for the Roosevelt-labor-democratic coalition in the 1946 Congressional Elections, according to the demands of our July Convention. These 1946 elections promise to be as crucial for the post-war period as was the 1944 Presidential Election for victory in the war.

There is arising a grave danger, however, in relation to the coming elections.

Since this matter is of so much greater importance than the issue of my own status in the Party, I feel that it is necessary to speak upon it today.

I have been reluctantly forced to the conclusion, in studying the development of events, that the position of the American working class is being endangered by threats of breaking up the Roosevelt-labor-democratic coalition which played such a decisive role in defeating fascism abroad and at home; and further that this danger has been greatly increased because our Party leadership has forgotten,

shelved, or revised the absolutely correct central decisions of our July Convention.

It had been my hope as I witness the step-by-step abandonment of the July Convention political directive by our Party leadership, that other voices than mine would be raised to call the Party back to its true path as determined by its Convention. Obviously I labor under a severe handicap in raising any question in the Party, and I therefore waited for others, more advantageously situated to speak up. But since the time is growing late, even dangerously late, and no such voices are raised, my conscience will not permit me longer to remain silent.

Permit me to state my views on this question briefly.

What was the Central point of our July Convention Resolution?

Obviously it could only be our estimate of the class and political groupings, and their political relationships within the country, their relationship to governmental policies at home and abroad and to the State Power. Upon such an estimate every serious Party must base its strategy and tactics, which are only the practical reflection of this basic estimate.

What was the *strategy* at the center of our July Convention Resolution?

It was the strategy “to weld together and consolidate the broadest coalition of all anti-fascist and democratic forces, including all supporters of Roosevelt’s anti-Axis policies.”

What was the *tactic* adopted to secure the successful application of this strategy?

It was “that the American people resolutely support every effort of the Truman Administration to carry forward the policies of the Roosevelt-labor-democratic coalition.”

They have been completely abandoned, and in their place has been developed in practice, in life, the opposite strategy of breaking up the Roosevelt-labor-democratic coalition, dealing with the Truman Administration as the chief enemy instead of the governmental expression of the coalition of which we are part and support.

Has this right-about-face by the Communist Party, revising the Convention Resolution, been forced upon us because the other parties to the coalition have broken it up, or because the Truman Administration has gone over to the reactionaries?

No, the Communist Party is the only group of serious importance to leave the coalition, and the Truman Administration is under the sharpest assault from the reactionaries without shirking the issues which keep it at the head of an ever more consolidated Roosevelt-labor-democratic coalition.

Can anyone deny the facts?

Philip Murray, speaking the conviction of the vast majority of trade unionists and their allies, gave the keynote for victory in the present historic strike struggles, when he concluded his statement on the opening of the steel strike with the following words:

“The American people must now be mobilized to give President Truman our full support in the struggle which lies ahead to maintain true collective bargaining and protect our free democratic institutions which are being challenged by those in industry who desire to place themselves above all laws and rules of equity and justice.”

Sidney Hillman sent a message to the President in which he said:

“On behalf of the CIO-PAC, I wish to express our deep appreciation of the firm stand you have taken in favor of wage increases to protect American workers against a drastic decline in living standards and to maintain the national purchasing power essential to a healthy economy.

“We are particularly appreciative of your patient and constructive effort to effect a settlement of the pending steel controversy. The refusal of the steel companies to accept your eminently fair and reasonable proposal demonstrates that they are placing their own selfish interests ahead of the national welfare.

“Be assured that you have our fullest support in the stand you have taken, as well as that of the great majority of the American people.”

And what is the Communist Party saying?

Comrade Foster went into head-on collision with Murray and Hillman. The mildest expression of the sustained campaign against Truman was when Foster said on January 15 [1946] at Madison Square Garden:

“The Truman Administration is following a wavering policy, which is working out to the benefit of the employers.”

Foster denounced Truman as a “*strike-breaker*” for the very same acts which caused Philip Murray and Sidney Hillman to praise him and promise him the support of labor and the people. Foster has consistently utilized every occasion of necessary criticism (such as the 30-day “cooling off” proposal) to resort instead to unconditional denunciation. Not content with a head-on collision with the CIO, Foster has in the last few days made a sharp zig-zag from several months of hysterical appeals for labor unity at all costs, and now practically declared war also against the AF of L leadership.

At a Congressional Committee hearing, reported in all newspapers in America, Foster placed the Communist Party in unconditional hostility to Truman, denouncing his Administration as the head and front of political reaction in America and the world.

Foster called upon [Henry] Wallace and [Harold] Ickes to resign from Truman’s Cabinet, knowing that such a development would wreck the Administration and with it all prospects for the most favorable outcome of the strike movement, as well as wrecking the favorable trend of international relations.

Foster has called for such conduct of the 1946 Congressional Election campaign as to “begin to lay the basis for an eventual third party progressive movement,” knowing that his words repeat the slogan of all who are trying to split up the Roosevelt-labor-democratic coalition, the Dubinsky Social Democrats, the Thomas Socialists, the Trotskyites, and their allies.

Under the slogan of “vanguardism” Foster has put our Party membership in a situation of bafflement and unclarity, isolated from their former allies, and uncertain who are friends and who are enemies.

Foster has led the Communist Party out of the Roosevelt-labor-democratic coalition, in violation of the July Convention decision; it is necessary that the Communist Party shall immediately restore that decision, and strive to regain its position within that Coalition.

Finally, what has happened to the Convention decision demanding “a larger, stronger, more influential and more effective mass organization of Communists.”

Foster has given us the opposite of his promise.

He has created such conditions that our Party has not only dropped all its gains of 1944, but twice as much; the membership

figures and level of activities are the lowest they have been in many years. Only to read the official admissions of the bad state of the Party is to get a picture of demoralization and apathy which has not been seen since the days of Lovestoneism. Factionalism, for 15 years not a major problem of our Party, is now spreading like an epidemic through the ranks *from above*, factionalism of the most unprincipled kind, which dares not put forth its objective but skulks behind the scenes.

To give this whole development its full significance, one must identify it by its scientific name. It is the trend of anarcho-syndicalism.

Nothing but drastic and quick correction, returning to the decisions of the July Convention, can save the working class and our Party from grave damage.

Earl Browder.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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