

# Cannon, Lovestone, and Browder

by William Z. Foster

THE COMMUNIST PARTY of this country, like Communist Parties elsewhere, throughout its whole existence has had to carry on a ceaseless struggle against the pervasive ideology of capitalism. This fight has been, and continues to be, waged against not only the spokesmen of capitalism who are outside of our Party, but also against those tricky elements who, in one devious form or another, have injected capitalist propaganda among the workers from within the framework of our Party. It is to this latter phase of our general ideological work, the fight against the class enemy within the gates, that this article, written on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of our Party, is primarily directed.

One of the chief capitalistic illusions to which American workers are subject, and one which we have long had to combat both within and without our Party, is the spurious idea to the effect that the capitalist system in this country is basically different from, and fundamentally superior to, the capitalist system of other lands. Capitalist spokesmen very carefully cultivate this illusion, which is highly dangerous to the workers. They are tireless in assert-

ing that the American economy is on a never-ending spiral of upward development; that this is a free land of equal opportunity; that there are no social classes or class struggle here; that Marxism-Leninism can sink no roots in the American working class; and that other countries, overwhelmed with a multitude of problems, may turn to Socialism, but that this can never happen to the United States.

American capitalism, it is true, has developed under particularly favorable conditions for its growth. Among these conditions may be noted the wide expanse of this country, possessing a rich variety of natural resources and unhampered by the many political frontiers and the hangovers from feudalism that have been such a handicap to European capitalism. Another big advantage of American capitalism has been that, lying strategically between the two great oceans and without powerful warlike neighbors on its borders, it has been largely free of wars upon its own territory and historically it has not needed to maintain a huge military organization. Indeed, in recent times the United States, because of its favorable location, has actu-

ally been able to grow rich on the two world wars that have done so much to ruin the rest of world capitalism. But these advantages of American capitalism can have only a temporary effect; they can by no means exempt capitalism in this country from the general crisis which is progressively engulfing the world capitalist system.

American capitalism is afflicted with all the fundamental inner and outer contradictions characteristic of capitalism generally.

Capitalist society here is based upon the private ownership of the means of production and upon the exploitation of the working class by the capitalists; between these two antagonistic classes there rages, with varying degrees of intensity, a constant class struggle. The contradiction between the limited consuming power of the exploited masses, as well as the narrowing world markets, on the one hand, and the constantly enhanced producing power of society on the other, exists in this country in colossal proportions, resulting in periodic economic crises which tend constantly to become more devastating. American capitalism, although possessing few outright colonies, has through its aggressive economic and political penetration become the chief exploiter and oppressor of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples, whose rising liberation movements it is desperately trying to stem. As Wall Street imperialism strives to subju-

gate even the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe, it comes into ever-sharper conflicts with its imperialist rivals. Sharing the hatred of Socialism common to the imperialists everywhere, American monopoly capital heads the intrigues and war maneuvers of the world imperialist camp against the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies. U.S. monopoly capitalism exhibits a most powerful impulse toward aggressive expansionism, fascism and war. In short, American capitalism, notwithstanding its relative strengthening as an outcome of the war, is fundamentally the same as capitalism throughout the world, with all its basic and irreconcilable contradictions.

American "exceptionalism," the erroneous idea that for some mysterious reason capitalism in this country is immune to the laws of growth and decay that apply to capitalism everywhere, has long confused American political thinking. For at least 100 years this illusion of the exceptional, or unique, character of our system of capitalism has persisted, all sections of the American people, including the workers, being deeply afflicted with it. It is the characteristic form that opportunism takes in the United States in the labor and Socialist movement. Many Marxian writers, from the days of Marx and Engels, have warned against this dangerous American misconception of the nature of the capitalist system in this country.

Even the Communist Party has not always been free from this poisonous network of "exceptionalist" illusions, which is so widespread among the American people. In practically all the major inner-Party theoretical controversies of the past, the question of American "exceptionalism," manifesting itself in tendencies to overestimate the strength of American capitalism, has played an important role. Whether the deviation in question from a correct, Leninist line took the form of "Left" sectarianism or Right opportunism, deep in the controversy, in either open or hidden form, was to be found an overestimation of the power of American capitalism, arising from the conception that, completely or partially, capitalism in the United States is superior to the laws governing world capitalism as a whole. The Party's ideological fights through the years against Cannon, Lovestone, and Browder all serve to illustrate the general point and to emphasize the danger of this particular illusion.

The founding of our Party in 1919 was accompanied, naturally enough, by deep-going, prolonged, and heated discussion of the principles of Marxism-Leninism. By the latter part of 1922, when our Party had begun to apply its principles in the class struggle and was playing an active part in the big battles of the workers against the employers' offensive in that period, in the struggles of the Negro masses against the

the K.K.K. and all other fights against aggressive reaction, the inner Party discussion, then dealing chiefly with questions of strategy and tactics, had crystallized itself into a two-sided national factional struggle. This factional struggle continued with varying degrees of intensity for several years, until late in 1929 when Party unity was finally achieved by cleansing the Party of alien, anti-Marxist-Leninist elements and by bringing about an amalgamation of the healthy Communist elements of the two main groups.

It is not my purpose here to undertake to evaluate this factional fight or to analyze the various policies and groupings involved in it, as that would take us too far afield. Suffice it for our present purpose to indicate that both the major factional groups in the Party (each of which had subgroupings) were afflicted to a greater or lesser extent with tendencies to exaggerate the strength of American imperialism. This fact was pointed out strongly at the time in statements on the American question by the Communist International, to which our Party was affiliated.

#### CANNON'S "LEFT EXCEPTIONALISM"

The sequel showed that the bulk of the members of both factional groups finally accepted the criticism made against them and sought to cleanse themselves of their opportunism. But J. P. Cannon and his

grouplet proved themselves unwilling and unable to do so. Cannon, who for several years had been a member of our Party's Central Committee, expressed his American exceptionalism, his fear of the "overwhelming power of American capitalism," by an acceptance of Trotskyism, with all its radical phrases, its pseudo-revolutionary programs, and its treachery to Socialism and the working class. Consequently, Cannon and his handful were expelled from the Party in October, 1928, as enemies of the workers and all that our Party stands for.

The essence of opportunism, whether of the "Left," sectarian brand or of the Right, openly opportunist variety, is always an over-estimation of the strength of the capitalist class and a lack of faith in the revolutionary power of the working class and its allies, the Negro people, farmers, professionals, etc. In all of its manifestations, both Right and "Left," opportunism works out in practice as a surrender to the capitalist class and to the transformation of the given opportunist group into an instrument for the weakening of the fight of the workers and for the maintenance of the power of the capitalists. The difference between Right and "Left" opportunists, therefore, is simply that, while the Rights more clearly expose their treason to the working class, the Negro people, and other democratic forces, by open proposals to collaborate with (surrender to)

the capitalists, the "Lefts," especially the Trotskyites, cunningly attempt to cover up their treachery by the most vehement use of radical phrasemongering. Thus, capitalism, with its Right and "Left" opportunist tools, works both sides of the street for its own benefit.

Cannon's retreat into phrasemongering in the face of American capitalism, that is, his "Leftist" expressions of American "exceptionalism," harmonizes with the similar course of Trotskyism in general. This is to be seen from a reference to the theories and activities of Trotsky himself, Cannon's mentor and guide. Thus, Trotsky, characteristically, was guilty of the most serious underestimation of the revolutionary power of the Russian people and of over-estimation of the strength of the capitalist enemy. As one of many instances of this, in 1917 Trotsky said the following, which he repeated in 1924 in his futile attempt to prove then that Socialism could not be built in one country, the U.S.S.R.:

It would be hopeless to think . . . for example, that a revolutionary Russia could hold its own in the face of a conservative Europe.

This was a gross exaggeration of the power of capitalism as against that of revolutionary Russia. Trotsky's counter-revolutionary pessimism, his exaggeration of the power of the capitalist system, has been knocked into a cocked hat by the ir-

resistible power with which the U.S.S.R. has gone ahead building Socialism during the intervening years. And especially was Trotsky's lugubrious prophecies of Socialist defeat in the U.S.S.R. repudiated by the brilliant manner in which the U.S.S.R. during World War II, not only "held its own in the face of a conservative Europe," but practically single-handedly shattered the great war-machine of German imperialism, the most powerful ever built in the history of world capitalism; moreover, the U.S.S.R. emerged from the titanic struggle stronger than ever.

Trotsky's magnifying of the power of world capitalism naturally resulted in a glorification of American imperialism. For while tipping his hat to Marxism by stating that American capitalism is a part of world capitalism and will eventually be submerged by its general crisis, Trotsky outdid himself, nevertheless, in expanding upon the power of American capitalism. Thus, in his book *Whither England?* published in 1925, he says of Anglo-American relations: "Relinquishing their world role, the diplomats and magnates of England are recommending their former clients to deal with the new master of the world."

At this time it was a matter of common knowledge that Great Britain was being ousted from capitalist leadership by the United States; but Trotsky drew the most extravagant conclusions from this well-

known fact. Thus, in the statement just quoted, he conceded offhand to American imperialism its dearest ambition, one that it has not been able to fulfill yet, 24 years later, and never will—namely, the mastery of the world. This exaggeration of the power of American capitalism was one side of Trotsky's political medal, on the other side of which was his gross underestimation of the power of revolutionary Russia in the face of world capitalism. It was in these false conceptions of Trotsky that the American "exceptionalism" of Cannon took root.

By the stern logic of political events, Trotskyites, including the Cannon elements in this country, have become the unprincipled tools of American imperialism, of which they have so long stood in awe. They are everywhere carrying on the most violent propaganda against the Soviet Union, against the new People's Democracies, against the Chinese Revolution; they are working hand-in-glove with the Social-Democrats trying to split the World Federation of Trade Unions; their activities, no less than those of the fascists, make them militant enemies of the Communists and of all real struggle against capitalism. And all this reactionary work, which the Trotskyites are performing under super-revolutionary guise, is water on the dam of aggressive American imperialism in its ruthless but futile campaign for the mastery of the world.

LOVESTONE'S RIGHT-WING  
"EXCEPTIONALISM"

The Communist Party came to grips with the openly Right-wing expression of American "exceptionalism" only a few months after it had cleansed its ranks of the Trotskyite, pseudo-Left brand of this peculiarly American type of opportunism. This decisive clash resulted, in June, 1929, in the expulsion of Jay Lovestone, who had been General Secretary of the Party, together with his pal, Benjamin Gitlow, and a smattering of others who, like these two, refused to accept the Party's decision and set out upon a factional line to defeat it. This elimination of the anti-Party Cannonites and Lovestoneites from our ranks finally brought the long factional struggle to an end and established a Party unity which has, except during the Browder revisionist period, endured until the present time.

Lovestone being an open opportunist, his "exceptionalism" was more clearly expressed and more obvious than that of the radical-phrasemongering Cannon. Lovestone boldly boasted of the super-strength, as he found it, of capitalism in this country. Like many other spokesmen of capitalism, he was intoxicated by the postwar industrial boom of the 1920's when American industry was prospering largely by repairing the war damages and filling the commodity shortages caused by World War I. Lovestone's voice glorifying the

strength of American imperialism was but one in the grand chorus of Social-Democrats, reactionary labor leaders, and enthusiastic capitalists in this and many other countries. Their propaganda then boasted that in mass production and "high wages" American capitalism had found the magic formula for an endless progressive development. According to these "exceptionalists," in the United States a "new capitalism" had been evolved, cyclical economic crises were henceforth impossible, the workers were becoming capitalists, and Ford, not Marx, was the leader to whom the peoples should turn for guidance in their search for well-being.

Lovestone tried to prostitute Marxism-Leninism to the glorification of booming American capitalism. He even had the gall to distort Lenin's law of the uneven development of capitalism into a monstrosity when he claimed that Lenin had inferred that it was quite possible for one section of world capitalism (that in the United States) to be healthy while the rest of world capitalism was basically sick. Lovestone scoffed at warnings against American "exceptionalism," as being only the "bogey" with which to frighten the timid. The inevitable trend of his policy was to confuse the Party's political analysis, to weaken its fighting spirit, and to expose it to the gross class collaborationism which, during these years of intense capitalist illusions, did such grave injury to

the trade-union movement.

In its "Open Letter" to our Party in December, 1928, the Comintern had the following to say in this matter:

The ideological level of Right errors in the American Communist Party was the so-called theory of "exceptionalism," which found its clearest exponents in the persons of Comrades Pepper and Lovestone, whose conception was as follows: a crisis of capitalism, but not of American capitalism; a swing of the masses to the Left, but not in America; the necessity of accentuating the struggle against reformism, but not in the United States; the necessity for struggling against the Right danger, but not in the United States.

Four months after Lovestone was expelled, that is, in October, 1929, there began the great world economic crisis. This started in the supposedly impregnable American economic system and spread throughout the world, bringing about an economic paralysis and mass unemployment on a gigantic scale hitherto unknown in capitalist history. The advocates of American "exceptionalism," the worshippers of the "new capitalism" in the United States, which was to end the class struggle and to do away with all possibilities of Socialism, were utterly confounded by this economic catastrophe. The outbreak of the world-capitalist economic crisis, which the Communists internationally had been predicting and which the worshippers of American

capitalism had said was impossible, marked a brilliant justification of Marxian analysis.

Lovestone, repudiated by the basic reality of the crisis, soon passed over openly to the service of the capitalism of which he had striven to make the Communist Party an adjunct. In due time he became the confidential agent of such sinister Red-baiters and Soviet-haters as Matthew Woll and David Dubinsky. He now concocts many of the slanders which these anti-labor elements hurl at everything progressive in this and other countries. And as for Lovestone's chief supporter in his "exceptionalism," Gitlow, he has long since become an open advocate of "free enterprise" and blatant American imperialism, a professional anti-Soviet "gangster of the pen," and a stool pigeon for every anti-labor, anti-Communist outfit willing to hire him.

#### BROWDER, APOSTLE OF "EXCEPTIONALISM"

The next major inner-Party struggle around the general question of American "exceptionalism" occurred in connection with the notorious opportunist thesis developed by Earl Browder, following the wartime Big Three Conference in Teheran, which took place in the latter part of 1943. In this Browder line, the deep-seated illusion that American capitalism is cut from a different and better cloth than the rest of world capitalism

came to its fullest and crudest expression.

Browder, who was General Secretary of our Party during the New Deal years, had become bedazzled with the liberal program of President Roosevelt. Failing to see that the reforms of this period were fundamentally the result of the heavy mass pressure of the workers, farmers, the Negro people, and other democratic strata, Browder began to develop the notion, in line with the traditional illusion of "exceptionalism," that American monopoly capital itself had become progressive. This anti-Marxist conception of his burst into full flower after the Teheran conference. It was at this conference that Great Britain and the United States finally agreed to open the long overdue second military front in Western Europe. In this, they were motivated by the fear that if they did not promptly send their troops across the English Channel, the Soviet armies, which were smashing ahead and driving Hitler's armies back rapidly on the Eastern Front, would inevitably defeat Nazi Germany practically single-handedly and liberate all of occupied Europe. So, after nearly two years of deliberate delay, which cost the Soviet Union millions of needless casualties, the Western powers at last agreed to invade Western Europe against the few, second-line German divisions that were still left there.

Browder opportunistically seized upon the Teheran Conference as a

glowing demonstration of his developing "exceptionalist" notion that American Big Business had become "progressive." And so, he launched forth, in January, 1944, with his fully developed revisionist program. In it he foresaw a postwar period of international amity among the great powers, in which American imperialism would cooperate freely and amicably with the U.S.S.R. for promoting the peace, economic advance, and democratization of the world. The peoples of China and Latin America would henceforth have no grounds for fighting the "beneficent" policies of Wall Street.

In the United States there would also reign a new era of genial class collaboration. Strikes would not be necessary (the wartime no-strike pledge should be continued); for the employers, in their own class interest, in order to dispose of their immense production of the industries, would voluntarily double and re-double the real wages of the workers. All talk, too, of a mass third party was "out"—we would get along nicely with the two-party system. The Negro people also would no longer need to fight for national liberation, but would depend upon the good will of the "intelligent capitalists" to concede them social equality. This was a program of a permanently growing and progressive capitalism. Consequently, Browder, logically enough, sought to liquidate the Communist Party, to cast aside the classics of Marx, Engels, Lenin,

and Stalin, and to abandon the whole perspective of Socialism—all of which were only encumbrances to his plans.

Browder, as a true apostle of American "exceptionalism," could not conceive of any other system of imperialism employing such a progressive program as he foresaw for American imperialism. According to him, British, German, Japanese, French, Italian, and other imperialisms, of course, were reactionary and could be nothing else. But with American imperialism it was quite a different story. The class interests of American capitalists, he argued, were compelling them to adopt a progressive, friendly, cooperative attitude toward their workers at home and toward the U.S.S.R. and other peoples abroad. This "exceptionalist" nonsense, Browder, like Cannon and Lovestone before him, sought to defend by making a gross distortion of the writings of Marx and Lenin. Of course, the class that stood to gain from all this revisionism, this crippling of the understanding and struggle of the working class and its allies, would only be the capitalists. Browder, like other "exceptionalists," was speaking in the interests of American imperialism.

The Party finally, in the middle of 1945, came to full grips with this Browder sickness, partly with the assistance of the well-known Duclos article, but mainly because the course of political events in the postwar situation was rapidly exposing the aggressive role of American imperial-

ism and was awakening the Party to the deadly fallacies of Browder's exceptionalism. But Browder, as Cannon and Lovestone had done earlier, refused to be corrected and set out to make an open fight. So, in February 1946, he was expelled from the Communist Party, as the expulsion resolution said: "for betraying the principles of Marxism-Leninism and deserting to the side of the class enemy—American monopoly capital."

Since his expulsion, Browder has fallen even more clearly into position as another of the many stooges of American imperialism, among those elements who are helping to delude the people and to disarm them in the face of the drive of American Big Business toward fascism and war. Although he has been forced by the actual course of political development to modify some of the absurd proposals that he made in his first statement of his "Teheran thesis," nevertheless Browder's basic line remains the same. He is a professional attacker of the Communist Party, a glorifier of American imperialism, a peddler of the dangerous illusion of American "exceptionalism," and he belongs where he is, in the camp of the Cannons, Lovestones, and other renegades from Communism.

#### THE PRESENT DANGER OF "EXCEPTIONALISM"

The danger of American "except-

tionalism," the "theory" that capitalism in this country is intrinsically superior to the capitalism of other countries, remains a live and persistent one. Indeed, it is now probably more virulent and menacing than ever before. This is mainly because of the fact that the capitalist system of the United States, protected by its geographical location from the devastation of two world wars, has grown rich and fat on these wars, while capitalism everywhere else has been weakened and undermined by them. In this situation, there luxuriously sprouts the noxious weed of American "exceptionalism," carefully sown and cultivated by the capitalists and their hangers-on.

Among the major manifestations of the current brand of American "exceptionalism" may be listed such illusions as the following—the misconception that the United States, by means of a Keynesian policy of government-cultivated capital investment, especially for armaments, can avert the cyclical economic crisis, even though all other capitalist countries should be paralyzed by it; the erroneous notion that the United States, by subsidies and other shots-in-the-arm, can rescue world capitalism from its general crisis and make it a going concern again; the false idea that this country can reverse the inexorable laws of historical development manifested in the present world trend and stamp out international Socialism; and the absurd belief that the United States, because

of its supposedly invincible strength, is destined to become the master of the world.

These "exceptionalist" theories are the basic conceptions of the dominant circles of American finance capital, and the Truman Government is shaping its policies upon them. The trade-union leadership of the A. F. of L., C.I.O. and Independent Unions, save for the "Left" unions, are saturated with these employer ideas and policies, undoubtedly to an even greater extent than when they were victims of the boss-propaganda of the "new capitalism" during the lush 1920's. This makes them eager cooperators with capitalist reaction in its present program of fascism and war. And we would be blind if we did not perceive that large sections of the working class, enmeshed in the huge propaganda machine of reaction, are also deeply infected with this virus of exceptionalism. Never before have the circles of capitalist corruption spread wider among the workers than at the present time.

In these days of such corroding employer propaganda among the workers and the broad masses of the people, however, we would do well to remember what happened to the widespread American "exceptionalist" illusions of the 1920's. Then, it will be recalled, as a result of the October, 1929, collapse and the ensuing prolonged and gigantic mass unemployment, the workers were able to cast off many of the capital-

ist illusions that had previously been crippling their actions, and the labor movement, recovering from the deep slump in the "prosperity period," went into the period of the greatest organizational and ideological development in its history. The Negro masses also undertook their greatest and most successful political struggles since the days of the Civil War. Our country is in for a repetition of this general democratic experience, but on a much larger scale and under new conditions. The present rank expansion of American capitalist illusions will explode even more resoundingly than did the "new capitalism" fantasies of a couple of decades ago.

But, of course, our Party cannot and does not take a fatalistic attitude, passively waiting for a time when the workers, the Negroes, and the democratic forces generally, under the force of cumulative economic and political pressures, will supposedly be able spontaneously to smash the lickspittle class-collaboration policies of the conservative and reactionary leaders and will embark upon a broad program of militancy and progress. Our job is to fight aggressively each and every one of the current capitalist illusions, both by propaganda means and by providing the workers and their allies with effective programs of action. And as we do so, particularly in this thirtieth year of our Party's life, let us, learning from our past experi-

ence with the Cannons, the Lovestones, and the Browders, never forget that we must be constantly on guard to preserve our own Party from the infiltration of paralyzing illusions of American "exceptionalism." Our Party does not live in a political vacuum; it is subject to all the corroding influences of capitalist ideology. Hence, we must not only fight against the present brutal attempts to outlaw our Party, but also struggle to protect the Party's political integrity against all enemy ideological influences.

Our Party's fight against "exceptionalist" opportunism is a struggle on two fronts, against both its Right and "Left" varieties, which, at bottom, are essentially the same. We must fortify ourselves against the insidious and widespread tendencies to exaggerate the power of American capitalism—that is, the notions of American "exceptionalism," with which our Party is always surrounded. This means that we must study and re-study the classical works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin and learn better than ever how to apply them, not mechanically, but in the light of specific American conditions. With the dominant leadership of the labor movement on all levels so deeply confused with poisonous illusions of American "exceptionalism," never has there been a greater need than now for our Party to master the science of Marxism-Leninism.