

---

## CONCERNING A CHARGE OF BETRAYAL

BY HANS BERGER

**M**R. MAX LERNER, in an article entitled "The Unpopular Front," in *PM* of March 28, criticized the Communist policies as Earl Browder developed them at the January meeting of the National Committee of the Communist Party. Since that criticism brought into focus all liberal criticism of an apparently "Left" character currently directed at the Communists, it merits discussion. Lerner's main arguments against the policy presented by Browder are the following:

"There are two premises in the new Communist Party line, as expounded authoritatively by Earl Browder in his interview given to *PM's* Harold Lavine, upon which everything turns. One is that *the world's fate hinges on Russia's future and Russia's alone. The second is that American progressives must give up their home-front struggle to fulfill the promise of American life, lest Wall St. fall out of the Teheran alliance.* I consider the first a misconception, the second a betrayal." (My emphasis—H.B.)

The misconception lies in Lerner's interpretation of Browder's position. Browder took as the starting point in his basic report, as well as in his interview, not the Soviet Union, but Teheran—that is, the agreement entered into by the leaders of our own country, Britain, and the Soviet Union for strengthening the leading coalition in the United Nations, for hastening victory through establishing the timing and the scope of the Western Front, and for laying the basis for post-war reconstruction through the continued Anglo-Soviet-American collaboration "in the war and in the peace that will follow." Browder's starting point was not the question: What kind of policy must we pursue in order to help the Soviet Union? His starting point was the question: How best can the national interests of the United States—the winning of the war, the maintenance of future peace, and the furtherance of economic and social well-being—be promoted?

If Lerner would attempt a serious analysis instead of indulging in gen-

eral phrases, he could not deny that this is the central problem on which the future of our nation and of the world depends. Browder explained in great detail that the significance of Teheran lies not only in the fact that it paves the way for effective military cooperation (the second front) but in that it offers also the perspective of post-war collaboration between the democratic capitalist powers and the Soviet Union. The peaceful co-existence and cooperation of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Britain following the defeat of Hitler-Germany and her satellites is the prerequisite for obviating another world war. If, after the common victory over Hitler, certain imperialistic circles were to succeed in their aim of unleashing unbridled inter-imperialist rivalry, or of setting the course of the United States or England toward war against the Soviet Union, the world would head for a still more terrible war catastrophe, in the course of which ultra-reaction would proceed to black out the democratic life of our nation. Such a war would be prepared, as was the case in Germany, by systematic reaction, by a systematic campaign for stupefying and brutalizing the masses, by systematic suppression of the working class movement and of all liberal opinion. The American fascistic reactionaries, just as Hitler did, would support the most anti-democratic adventurist elements in other countries, would intervene directly and indirectly to crush all working class and generally progressive forces in other

countries in order to obtain allies, gendarmes, and quislings. American reaction, American fascists would attempt to achieve with far more open means what English policy achieved between 1917 and 1939, not without help on our part, and what was so "brilliantly successful" in Germany.

This is the basis on which Browder focuses the attention of America on "Teheran," as the core of every present and future policy affecting our nation and the world. Browder does this as a Marxist, warning with Marxist farsightedness against the horrible possibility of a new world war, with the most terrible consequences for the life of the entire nation and especially for the conditions of the American working class and all liberals, including the Max Lerner. Browder the Marxist has never declared that Teheran automatically guarantees against the possibility of such a development. Just because "Teheran" must be fought for, and maintained and developed in struggle against its opponents, just because reactionary pro-fascist forces are attempting and will increasingly attempt to destroy the basis it has given us, Browder warned so explicitly against the anti-Teheran perspectives and urged upon the nation full understanding and whole-hearted implementation of the wartime and peacetime policies of collaboration agreed upon at Teheran.

\* \* \*

Where is the misconception of which Lerner speaks? Without question, the Teheran Agreement is.

also in the interest of the Soviet Union. It is of utmost importance to the Soviet Union, and equally so to the United States and Britain, to end this war as swiftly as possible in coalition warfare through the second front. It is of the utmost importance to the Soviet Union, and equally so to the American and British nations, not to be drawn into a new world war and to prevent such a war.

Nor is Teheran less in the interest of France and of the other peoples of Europe, whose liberation depends on the cooperation of the great powers, and whose post-war development would be in the greatest danger if American and English reactionaries attempted to make them gendarmes against the Soviet Union and other peoples.

Browder's premise, therefore, does not, as Lerner falsely interprets, make "Russia's future and Russia's alone" the pivot of all policy. That premise is the premise recognized by the President of the United States in conjunction with the leaders of Great Britain and the Soviet Union, who voiced the deep-going sentiment of the American, British, and Soviet peoples, as the only basis for policy for the three great Coalition Powers on the road to victory and an enduring peace. When the German Communists declared that friendly relations to the Soviet Union were a life-and-death matter for the German nation, they were charged by the German Max Lerner with considering the Soviet Union "primarily" and "in opposition to" the interests of the German nation

Lerner declares he is for Teheran.

But when Browder presents the full meaning of Teheran as the basis of every serious progressive policy, then Lerner talks about "misconception." It behooves one in Lerner's position to accustom himself to thinking questions through to the end. Were he to discard the arrogance of superficiality, it might be possible for him to learn from the Communists to be a consistent progressive.

\* \* \*

Lerner accuses Browder and the American Communists of "betrayal." He asserts that the Communists demand that the "American progressives give up their homefront struggle to fulfill the promise of American life, lest Wall St. fall out of the Teheran alliance." Lerner writes:

*"What is Browder's basic fallacy is the belief that the American isolationists and the reactionary primitives can be appeased rather than they must be mastered; it is his belief that they can be lured into good behavior on foreign policy if only we surrender to them on domestic policy. This is to substitute the politics of blandishment and manipulation for the politics of majority strength. To abandon the home-front struggle thus is a betrayal of the best American progressive tradition. It is a betrayal of the Marxian tradition as well in its crucial principle—that men can, acting together, transform themselves by transforming their living conditions and their power structure. I know of very few thinking Amer-*

ican progressives who will not be surprised at the extent to which the Communists now depart from their basic principle." (*My emphasis—H. B.*)

Lerner has often expressed his spiritual concern about our existence, and has let it be known that in his opinion it would be best if we disappeared. Lerner belongs to that group of liberals who have a troubled conscience concerning the Communists. They fear to be branded as fellow-travelers, since that would create difficulties for their whole material and social existence. They must therefore continuously still their conscience and better judgment with new arguments against the Communists. They must continuously prove to the world and to themselves why they are not consistent.

Wherein does this "betrayal" consist? Lerner does not make clear when this betrayal occurred. Does the betrayal consist perhaps in the fact that we support the Roosevelt Administration? That we are opposed to strikes in the war? That we oppose the raising of divisive issues that would weaken our nation's fighting power and civilian morale? Does the betrayal perhaps consist in the fact that we are inflexibly determined to carry this policy through to victory? What other policy have Lerner and *PM* to propose?

Where do Browder and the American Communists "appease" the American "isolationists" and the "reactionary primitives"? Don't the Communists carry on a consistent

struggle against the defeatists and pro-fascists who would hinder the prosecution of the war, who put all possible obstacles in the path of the Administration, who systematically attempt to disunite and demoralize the nation? Don't the Communists carry on a consistent struggle against the reactionary, pro-fascist forces who want to undermine our relations with our allies and smash the strength of the United Nations? We ask Lerner and *PM*: In what does the betrayal consist?

What other policy is a progressive one? Is John L. Lewis, perhaps, Lerner's ideal? Is Lerner's ideal the Trotskyite camp, which defames this great war of national liberation as "imperialist"? Is Lerner's progressive ideal Norman Thomas, that "Socialist" helpmate of Hitlerism who finds a dozen "progressive questions" a day, all of which have but one aim, to prove that the consistent prosecution of the war is not in the interest of the American nation?

Browder condemned the First World War as an imperialist war. He went to jail for his just belief. Browder and the American Communists, in common with all enlightened American patriots, know this war to be a war for national liberation. They, therefore, draw all the conclusions that will help prosecute this war victoriously. The American Communists would be traitors to the interests of the American working class and of the nation if they did not make speedy and decisive victory in the war the guide to all their policies, to which all other questions must be subordinated.

Hence, the Lerner's must be asked publicly: Wherein lies the betrayal by the American Communists in this war of liberation? And what, gentlemen, is your policy?

Does Lerner accuse us of betrayal because we do not consider socialism the issue on the order of the day? We do not know to what degree Lerner and *PM* and the liberals of whom he speaks consider the socialist revolution to be an issue on the order of the day. That is not stated very clearly either in the articles of Lerner, or in *PM*. And if they really do consider it an actual issue for our day, they have been singularly skillful in concealing from the nation the task which they propose it undertake.

Or is the charge of betrayal perhaps made on the assumption that we do not regard the working class any longer as the most progressive class in society, the class which, by its development, strength, and political maturation, qualifies itself for functioning as a leading force in the nation? But there are no Communists, there have been none, and there will be none who ever doubted this basic thesis of Marxism. On the contrary, our liberals, including Lerner, don't understand to this very day this unalterable principle of Marxism—despite their extensive libraries.

Or is the accusation of betrayal leveled on the assumption that we have given up the fight for the development of our democracy, for full equality for the Negro people, for wiping out the poll-tax shame, for safeguarding the democratic liberties so dearly won by the Amer-

ican people? Can the Lerner's cite one instance from our practice or one sentence from our declarations that could substantiate such a charge?

Or is the accusation of betrayal made on the assumption that we have proposed that the workers, the toiling farmers, the great masses of the nation say "amen" to whatever the reactionary forces in the nation decree in the way of taxes, wages, prices, etc.? Lerner cannot deny that we carry on an energetic struggle against all depredations on the living standards of the men and women on the production front and support all campaigns that undertake such action. In conducting this policy of struggle, we make clear that under war conditions we are opposed to all such actions that would disturb war production and interfere with the prosecution of the war. That is why we have vigorously opposed Lewis and all advocates of strikes during the war.

The President in his Annual Message to Congress, in January, proposed an economic Bill of Rights, much clearer and more meaningful for victory and a progressive post-war development than anything proposed to date by liberals of the Max Lerner type. It is a program of far-reaching reforms which can be carried out in the framework of American capitalism. We welcomed this program, as did millions of trade unionists and millions of Americans of the most varied strata and occupations. As Communists together with all labor and progressives, together with the American

fathers, husbands, sons and brothers in uniform, we support such a program which declares:

"In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all, regardless of station, race or creed.

"Among these are:

"The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation;

"The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;

"The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living;

"The right of every businessman, large and small to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad;

"The right of every family to a decent home;

"The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;

"The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident and unemployment;

"The right to a good education;

"All of these rights spell security. And after this war is won we must be prepared to move forward, in the implementation of these rights, to new goals of human happiness and well-being."

If, instead of resorting to general phrases, Lerner would present a bill of particulars, he would discover that he has not the slightest grounds for accusing us of betrayal. If he endeavored to formulate concretely the needs of the American people, now and in the post-war world, he would find himself on the same platform with the great trade unions of our country, and also, whether it be to his liking or not, with us Communists. Only so long as he stays in the hazy "higher regions," can he hurl lightning bolts at us—bolts that are cold, devoid of the fire of truth.

Lerner reproaches Browder for "his acceptance of monopoly control of the American economy on the ground of inevitability and handing the world over to the despoilment by the cartels."

What does Browder accept and what does he see as inevitable?

Browder realizes that in its dominant sections American monopoly capital supports the war. The American capitalists have helped, by and large, to produce everything necessary for the war. In this historic hour for the American nation, the decisive sections of American capitalism are aligned with all the patriotic forces of all classes in the great national war of our country. This very significant fact, in contradistinction to the situation in those European countries where the decisive strata of the bourgeoisie have brought national catastrophe upon their peoples, taken together with the non-socialist ideology of the

overwhelming mass of the American people, must be taken into consideration by every Marxist who wants to pursue a practical progressive policy. What, therefore, is the issue, the inevitable issue, as it presents itself to every serious Marxist?

Should one ascend to the "higher regions" à la Lerner, in splendid isolation from the actual present situation, howl meaningless phrases about the power of the monopolies? Or should one set himself to work with labor, with the people, toward the effective solution of the most urgent wartime and post-war problems of the nation? These are not little problems unworthy of a liberal custodian of Marxism. They are the problems of winning the war and of preventing a terrible post-war crisis with possibly 10,000,000 or 15,000,000 unemployed, and the most dangerous social and political consequences, nationally and internationally. What have the Max Lerner to offer toward the solution of these problems?

Browder well put it:

"... Today, to speak seriously of drastic curbs on monopoly capital, leading toward the breaking of its power, and imposed upon monopoly capital against its will, is merely another form of proposing the immediate transition to socialism—or else it is the Utopian trust-busting program of return to an earlier, pre-monopoly stage of capitalism.

"National unity around a program to break the power of monopoly capital is possible only if and when the

majority of the people can be united for the institution of socialism in the United States.

"That time is not now, and certainly not in the 1944 elections."\*

For the Max Lerner, who refuse to face this reality (not created by the Communists), the only perspective is darkness, hopelessness, and desperate charges of "betrayal."

Earl Browder and the Communists do not see any reason for desperation. The American Communists consider it possible, even within the framework of American capitalism, to avoid the Lernerian darkness.\*\* The precondition for objective post-war reconstruction is an appreciation of the extent of the problems to be solved after victory and the cooperation of all strata of the population who are determined in their mutual interest to avoid a colossal crisis.

Max Lerner appears outraged when Browder speaks of cooperation also with the patriotic sections of monopoly capital; Max Lerner does not understand what cooperation means. Consequently, he accuses the Communists of appeasing reaction. One can cooperate in various ways. Chamberlain cooperated with Hitler. The result was war and fascist triumphs. The German Social-Democrats cooperated with Bruening in the great economic crisis. This cooperation consisted in permitting the

\* Earl Browder, *Teheran and America*, Workers Library Publishers, p. 23.

\*\* We would earnestly recommend to Mr. Lerner that he study the highly enlightening article by Gilbert Green in *The Communist* for April.

Bruening government to throw the full burden of the crisis onto the backs of the toilers. As a result, the fascist offensive was the more successful. In these cases the word "cooperation" was a synonym for capitulation, sacrifice of the interests of the working class and of the nation to reaction and fascism, with the well-known consequences. But Browder has not proposed cooperation in order that the burden of a terrible crisis might be placed on the people. On the contrary, he proposed cooperation through anti-fascist national unity, precisely for guaranteeing the adoption of such measures that will avoid the crisis.

Browder states to the class in control of American economy: The great masses of the American people are convinced that our rich and resourceful country can, by internal measures and through economic cooperation with other countries for achieving the Teheran objectives, avoid a post-war crisis and mass unemployment. To solve the post-war problems will not be a simple task. But they can be solved. If you wish to avoid crisis and disintegrating social conflicts, it is necessary that in conjunction with labor, farmers, and middle classes, you work for the adoption of such common policies, supplemented by governmental measures, that will solve the problems of the post-war world.

It is a proposal to cooperate against unemployment, against crisis, against the danger of fascism and new imperialist adventures. It is the proposal to solve all the diffi-

cult social and economic problems of the post-war world in a way which will guarantee the maximum of peaceful development. It is cooperation in the interests of an economic Bill of Rights, not cooperation à la Chamberlain, or à la Social-Democracy.

But Max Lerner has still another argument against cooperation. The Communists are so weak that the "tough capitalists" will not cooperate with them at all. Of course, the American Communists are still too weak today to convince "tough American capitalists" of the need for cooperation. Therefore, if this cooperation depended on the Communists alone it would be condemned to failure. Cooperation among various classes, in their mutual interests, can only be successful, and not be transformed into labor's capitulation, when the working-class movement, on the basis of maximum unity and an understanding of the *whole* situation, uses its strength to cooperate and to solve these urgent problems with the organizations and representatives of the other classes. Therefore, at the very time that they establish the necessity for this cooperation, the Communists, as part of the labor movement, emphasize the necessity for labor unity, the strengthening of trade union organization and joint action.

Where in all these considerations, in these conclusions is there betrayal? Who can seriously assert that the development of such a policy as Browder has outlined makes it easier for reaction, for fascism, in

America or in other countries? On the contrary, it is precisely such a policy—the policy based on Teheran—which shows the working class, the broad masses of the people, the whole nation, the great historic course of achieving a speedy victory and of returning to peace without a post-war crisis, without threat to national security, and of creating the preconditions for further social progress.