

ON THE THEORETICAL WORK OF THE PARTY

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I.

THE NEED FOR SYSTEMATICALLY organizing the theoretical work of the Communist Party has now become pressingly urgent. Ever since its foundation in 1919 our Party has been weak in the vital matter of Marxist-Leninist theory. This is partly a reflection of the general underestimation of theory characteristic of American political life, and we have added to this by special neglects of our own. The general result has been the weakening of the vanguard role of our Party in the fields both of ideological and practical struggle.

Our neglect of Marxist-Leninist theory manifests itself in a variety of ways. We do not read our classics enough; we do not effectively instruct our membership in the principles of Marxism-Leninism; nor do we effectively carry these principles to the broad masses. We do not adequately tie in theory with practice; we do not always clearly work out the relationship between our day-to-day policies and our fundamental principles. We do not methodically cultivate our best Marxists, nor do we direct their activities. If we had paid

more attention, over the years, to raising the theoretical level of our membership and leadership, Browder would have found it much more difficult to foist his revisionism on our Party.

Especially is our Party weak, from the standpoint of Marxist-Leninist theory, in its altogether inadequate projection of constructive, original analyses of specific features of present-day American and world capitalism. Marxism-Leninism is, of course, much more than the mere memorizing of pat quotations with which to pepper our articles and speeches. It is far more, too, than the simple absorption of a general knowledge of our basic principles to serve as a groundwork for the working out of daily political policies, important though this is. A mastery of Marxism-Leninism implies, above all, the ability to tackle all economic, political, and social problems, to unmask their true meaning and to translate our answers into practical policies. It is in this creative use of theory that we are weakest. For that reason the main attention of this article is directed to this special aspect of Marxism-Leninism. Its aim is to emphasize our burning need for more and better works of constructive Marxist-Leninist analysis.

As the world capitalist system sinks ever deeper into its general crisis, it generates a host of new theoretical and political problems in every field of human activity. Because of the key role of the United States in world economy and also because of the many specific characteristics of American capitalism,

these various new problems present themselves with particular acuteness and urgency in our country. Unfortunately, however, we are lacking in initiative in signalizing these problems, in grappling theoretically with them, in boldly challenging the bourgeois apologists on every field as Marxists should, and in bringing our Marxist-Leninist answers home to our Party and the broad masses.

While our best Marxists are undoubtedly doing much creative analysis in various fields, this work is nevertheless being carried on in a scattered, disorganized, and altogether inadequate fashion. We are not making proper use of such competent forces as we have, nor are we skilfully training new forces. In consequence, we often entirely ignore many vital problems, or at best, make only hasty, superficial analyses of them. The general result is to weaken our work on the whole theoretical and political front, to reduce our policy-making to a semi-empirical basis, and to expose us in many instances to the insidious danger of trailing after Left petty-bourgeois intellectuals. For this chronic theoretical weakness our Party constantly pays dearly in many ways.

The Browder revisionist period vastly emphasized and intensified our Party's grave theoretical weaknesses. Increasingly, Browder, sinking deeper and deeper into opportunism, deliberately played down the study and application of Marxism-Leninism by our Party. The sale and reading of Marxist classics declined drastically, and our schools more and

more became infected with crass opportunism. During this period, when Browder revisionism gained supremacy in the Party, the atmosphere was such as to discourage the development of new Marxist writers. Browder, conceitedly posing as a super-Marxist theoretician, tried to arrogate the Party's theoretical work to himself. He failed to analyze the many problems cast up by capitalism in those years, glibly accepting the Roosevelt (Keynesian) answers to them. He finally even boldly urged the Party to throw aside its "old [Marxian] books and doctrines" and to base itself upon his intellectual trash. He insolently tried to rewrite Marx and Lenin on the basis of his bourgeois reformism. He wound up by landing us in the swamp of his "notorious revisionist" Teheran thesis. Then the Party woke up.

What Browder tried to do was to liquidate the Party's theoretical line by abandoning Socialism and the principles of Marxism-Leninism, to liquidate its political program by making it into an adjunct of American imperialism, and finally to liquidate the Party itself by transforming it into an amorphous "political association." What the Party has been doing since the Emergency Convention of 1945, at which Browderism was repudiated and after which Browder was expelled, is to reverse this whole Browder liquidatory course. We have reorganized the Party; we have re-established for it a correct Marxist-Leninist political program; and now we are turning our

attention to improving the theoretical work of the Party. The long period of Browder revisionism has left our Party still entangled theoretically at many points, particularly in the field of economics, with the Keynesian liberals. To disentangle it is proving to be a complex and difficult task.

Since the repudiation of Browder's revisionism our Party has made a sharp improvement in its attitude toward Marxist-Leninist theory. It has learned from bitter experience to value the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin more highly than ever before. A real "going back to the books" is taking place; a genuine appreciation of Marxist theory is now developing in the Party. Obviously, the impulse of our membership and leaders is to correct, not only the vulgar opportunist errors of the Browder period, but, even more significantly, to begin to overcome the underestimation of Marxist theory that has existed in our Party for so long a time. A kind of renaissance, so far as theoretical work is concerned, is beginning to develop in our ranks—that is, it can be a renaissance if we understand how to cultivate this valuable development.

These are many signs of the new interest in Marxist-Leninist theory that is developing in our Party. In the recent period, *Political Affairs* has markedly improved in its theoretical quality. On the basis of a recent discussion by the National Board, our theoretical organ has adopted an elaborate program of theoretical work. *Political Affairs* has

the task of ever improving its role and work as the leading journal of Marxist-Leninist theory in this country.

Our students and writers, our magazines and schools, are ever more intensely devoting themselves to the working out of Marxist-Leninist analyses and to raising the general theoretical level of our Party. One of the most ambitious of these many theoretical endeavors is the Party's present intensive analysis of the so-called New Economics, or Keynesism. But it is not the purpose of this article to evaluate the various important books, pamphlets, and articles that have been recently produced in our Party on various aspects of Marxism-Leninism. Much of this material is good, and much requires basic criticism. To estimate it properly is the task of a special study. Here the purpose is rather to indicate the existence of the new theoretical work being developed in our Party, and to point out some of the more urgent tasks confronting it.

This renewed interest in Marxist theory is a manifestation of the health of the Party. It shows that our Party is striving to meet its responsibilities as the vanguard of the working class in the fierce ideological struggle now going on between the forces of democracy and those of reaction. Even though the Party is now under violent attack by Red-baiters and warmongers, it is able to begin to develop a counter-offensive of its own on the theoretical front, as well as in its other political activities. This fact is eloquent

testimony to the basic strength of the Party.

II

In the present article it is possible to give only an indication of some of the theoretical tasks confronting our Party. The list given below is by no means complete. It will be noted that a number of the subjects mentioned have to do with immediately sharpening up our daily political policies, while others are more of a long range character. It will also be realized that in regard to some of these problems much work has already been done, while others have as yet been barely touched upon by our writers, if treated at all.

1) Much work needs to be done to define clearly the new position of the United States in the world economy. Urgently needed studies along this line include: America's relation to the world crisis of capitalism; the special features of American imperialism (to refute those who claim that American imperialism is progressive); the economic foundations of American imperialism; the fallacies of "American exceptionalism" (the theory that American capitalism has unique economic laws of its own and is capable of regenerating decadent world capitalism); etc., etc.

2) In the field of economics there are also many problems to be dealt with. In the main these add up to an analysis of the so-called New Economics (Keynesism) and a systematic refutation of the many illusions it creates. Under this general heading special subjects requiring intensive analysis include: a further

treatment of the extent and role of American monopoly; a definitive study of the present role of finance capital (to refute those who claim that the banks are no longer a decisive economic and political factor); further discussion of the question of the national debt; an analysis of the new features of Federal taxation; an analysis of the specific features of capital accumulation in the United States (with special regard to the Keynesian illusions about the savings of the workers and the middle class); a survey of the distribution of wealth in the United States; a treatment, from the economic standpoint, of the relation of the Marshall Plan to the approaching cyclical economic crisis in the United States; a detailed analysis of the specific American types of Keynesism; an examination of the course of the real wages of American workers during recent decades; a documented repudiation of the various current "full employment under capitalism" panaceas; a refutation of the Keynesian "multiplier," or pump-priming theory; an outline of the economic basis for Socialism in the United States; the specific characteristics of American wartime economy; etc., etc.

3) In practical politics there are also many questions that need further theoretical clarification. Among many others, studies are needed which will: elaborate the political conditions under which programs of nationalization of basic industries may be projected; state the limits of economic planning under capitalism; further elaborate the forms of self-

determination for the Negro people; expand further the analysis we have begun of the relation of religion to American politics, and the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and of the Vatican in world affairs; correct theoretically the Browder revisionist errors in our work among women and youth; re-examine our theoretical position regarding national minority groups in the United States, with special attention to the "melting pot" theories; deal with the whole question of Communist Party united-front relations with its political allies; outline the specific features of American fascism; etc., etc.

4) In the arts and sciences and in the field of philosophy Marxists also have many tasks of analysis and exposition. Most important is a thoroughgoing treatment and refutation of Dewey's pragmatism. It is also necessary further to elucidate the particularly intensive corruption in the U.S.—because of the vast extent of monopoly domination—of literature and the arts, the motion pictures, the radio, and culture generally in its various forms and expressions. As never before, we Communists must expand our many activities in exposing the decadence, nihilism, and fascist dehumanization of "Western" bourgeois culture. There are innumerable other tasks also in the fight against the manifold trends of idealism and obscurantism now being cultivated by reactionary capitalist agents in every field of science. In this regard, special attention must be paid to the prostitu-

tion of the biological sciences to reactionary political ends, such as the fascist theories of racial superiority, élite-ism, and the like. Our Party must display an interest and activity in all these intellectual fields comparable to the work now being carried on by the Communist Parties in Europe. We have many good writers in these fields who can lock horns with the bourgeois theoreticians and confusionists on every theoretical front. Our Party should be the leader in the United States in every intellectual field, which is very far from being the case today in the United States.

5) In the field of American history, there is likewise vast work to be done by Marxist historians and theoreticians. American democratic and revolutionary traditions must be far more actively utilized as a powerful weapon in the class struggle. There is, therefore, a great need for a Marxist general history of the United States. Another vital need is a thoroughgoing historical treatment of the trade union movement in all its phases. An amplification of our Marxist histories of the Negro people, and original work regarding the much-neglected Indian peoples, are also very much in order. All this historical work should be done with the thought definitely in mind of correcting the crass bourgeois reformism that Browder injected, during a dozen years, into the studies made, in that period, of American history.

6) Our Party also faces many theoretical tasks requiring an intensive

application of Marxist-Leninist analytical principles to specific general American conditions and developments. A few of these are: a thoroughgoing reevaluation of the political character of the Roosevelt regime; an analysis of the roots and development of Browder's revisionism; a well-rounded analysis of the effect of the various bourgeois ideological trends on the American working class; an analysis of the specific American type of Social Democracy; a convincing exposition of the superiority of Socialist democracy over bourgeois democracy; a presentation of the conditions requisite for the transition to Socialism; a summary of the development of Marxian theory in the United States; and the development of a general political and economic perspective for the United States. Finally, it is high time to begin writing an authoritative history of the Communist Party of the United States.

7) In connection with thus improving the creative theoretical work of the Party it is indispensable that we also develop a much sounder manner of applying Marxist-Leninist criticism than we now have. It is essential, of course, that we follow very closely the output of bourgeois writers in all the fields of economics, politics, art, philosophy, literature, and science, and subject these writings to a much more incisive criticism and Marxist evaluation. It is no less necessary that we apply searching criticism to our own theoretical writings, always in a constructive, comradely spirit.

In our Party and in the ranks of progressive writers generally, there are many authors who are turning out a considerable volume of Marxist-Leninist writings, of varying levels of competency. Generally, we give our writers insufficient pre-printing criticism, and even less after they appear in print. Too often our analyses of articles, pamphlets, and books are hardly more than either "puffs" and "blurbs" or indiscriminate condemnation, with little or no regard to their intrinsic merit. We must correct this harmful, un-Marxian, petty-bourgeois practice. A penetrating and frank evaluation is a fundamental necessity, and is the only way by which we can establish satisfactory standards of quality in our Marxist-Leninist theoretical output.

III

To improve our Marxist-Leninist work of creative analysis the major task before us is, of course, to raise the general theoretical level of our Party membership and leadership. We must engender a genuine love for, and interest in, Communist theory in our Party. This will require real attention to this question in all our schools, journals, and other means of education.

It would require a special article to detail our tasks in this basic work of raising the Party's theoretical level. Such is not the purpose of this article, the aim of which is to indicate how we can make better use of the trained Marxist forces that the Party now has at its disposal. We

have many such forces. The trouble is that they are not cultivated and organized. Our theoretical work goes ahead on a haphazard, desultory, hit-or-miss basis. We have no planned theoretical program and we are making no organized analysis of the many theoretical problems confronting us. The Party gives no systematic leadership on the vital theoretical front.

This impossible situation must be corrected. All of us must understand that work on the theoretical front, as on the political front, must be conducted on a systematic basis. Under the Browder regime Marxist-Leninist theory was stifled in our Party; today it must be methodically cultivated and developed, both in the sense of a general education of our Party in Marxist-Leninist principles and in the organized application of these principles to the solution of the urgent and important theoretical problems facing us.

To these general ends the Party needs to set up a standing commission on the theoretical work of the Party, to be made up of leading Party workers and writers. Indeed, the National Board is already taking steps in this direction. The functions of this commission on theoretical work should be, in addition to stimulating theoretical education generally in the Party, especially to turn the Party's attention to constructive Marxist-Leninist analysis. The commission should clearly outline the Party's most important theoretical tasks and then proceed to assign them to specific comrades for analy-

sis. The commission should also carefully evaluate all our Marxist-Leninist theoretical writings, *before they are printed*, and it should likewise strive to maintain at the highest level the quality of the theoretical teaching in our schools and journals. The commission should, particularly, keep sharp watch on the latest outpourings of capitalist thinkers and propagandists and carefully organize our Party's ideological counteroffensive against them.

One of the many major tasks of the commission on theoretical work should be to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical work in our Party. As things now stand, those comrades who specialize in theory do little or no practical day-to-day political work, while our Party's political leaders rarely do any theoretical writing. This situation is bad all around and must be remedied. Our specialized theoretical writers must be helped to get rid of any "ivory tower" tendencies on their part and integrated into Party work, while our political leaders (no matter how busy they may be) should be required to write specific theoretical articles.

Another task of the commission on theoretical work should be to develop among our comrades an inner sense of the urgency of maintaining continuous individual study and application of Marxism-Leninism. At present, in too many cases, our political leaders have the habit of neglecting to do serious Marxist reading or analyses for long periods, with the idea in mind of later "pol-

ishing" themselves up in some school course or other. But Marxism-Leninism is not something that can be taken periodically in doses in this fashion. Schools and study courses for leading cadres are very good and should be greatly extended, but they are no substitute for daily individual study and application of Marxism-Leninism. We must learn to combine theory with our daily work. No leader is so busy that he can afford to neglect theory.

A major means by which the study and application of Marxist-Leninist theory in our Party can be stimulated would be by the organization of periodic open conferences on theoretical problems. Such conferences could be held about once a year. They should be two-day, week-end gatherings, with regular agendas. These conferences on Marxist-Leninist theory could take up the most urgent problems confronting us on the theoretical front; specific papers could be read, followed by general discussion. Such broadly attended conferences would have highly beneficial results. We hold conferences on Negro work, on

women's work, on trade union work, and on many other activities; why not, then, conferences on theoretical work? Some years ago, *The Communist* held such a conference, with very good results. The national conference of Marxist cultural workers, held in mid-1947 under the auspices of *New Masses* and *Mainstream*, was an event to be hailed. One of the first tasks of the commission on theoretical work, therefore, should be to organize a conference on Marxist-Leninist theory, to take place in the near future.

The improvement of our Party's Marxist-Leninist theoretical work along the lines suggested above will strengthen the Party in every respect—in its numbers, its mass contacts, its political work, its ideological fiber. The whole question of better theoretical analysis, already too long delayed, should receive the earnest attention of our Party. Our Communist Party is becoming more mature politically and it is facing ever more complex problems. To advance to a higher theoretical level in its work has therefore become imperative for it.

"It is in particular the duty of the leaders to gain an ever clearer insight into all theoretical questions, to free themselves more and more from the influence of traditional phrases inherited from the old world outlook, and constantly to keep in mind that socialism, since it has become a science, must be pursued as a science, *i.e.*, it must be studied."

Frederick Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*.