

Earl Browder:

Preparatory Years of Study

This is the third installment of the life-story of Earl Browder, Communist candidate for President, by M. J. Olgin, Communist leader and editor of the Morning Freiheit.

By M. J. Olgin

It was in the Syndicalist League that Earl Browder met another great leader, William Z. Foster. At that time Browder lived in Kansas City. Foster came to address meetings organized by Browder. The two met. Browder became a pupil of Foster, learned the basic lessons of trade unionism and organizational methods from him. They developed a friendship which has lasted for over twenty years. From then on, their paths in public life were connected. William Z. Foster and Earl Browder are now the recognized leaders of the Communist Party. They have attained world renown.

In the meantime, while Browder's grasp of social problems was growing and his activities in the labor movement increasing, he had to work for a living. In 1916-17 he worked for the farmers' cooperative movement. He had not known much about farmers or farmers' cooperatives when he went into that work. Before long he was asked to become a member of the National Advisory Board of the Cooperative League of America. He joined and did considerable work for the League, particularly in the field of writing.

GRADUATED A LAWYER

Before we proceed we must say a few words about how Earl Browder got his degree as a lawyer. He couldn't attend school. That was out of the question. But he wanted to study law. Not because the legal profession attracted him but because he thought that in this way he would get better acquainted with the management of state affairs. He took a correspondence course in law at the Lincoln Jefferson University of Indiana.

Studying was not all play. It was hard labor. The student had to read his lessons carefully and to digest many textbooks. He had to write papers. He had to pass examinations. Browder soon discovered that the course did not give him what he had expected. But he stuck it through. In 1914 he graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Law. He could be admitted to the bar if he applied for an examination. He never did. He never intended to become a lawyer anyway. "It was a matter of intellectual discipline," he says. And discipline aplenty he got from the course.

A VISION OF SOCIETY

Behold the growth of the man. Other boys in his position dream of becoming partners in the firm where they work. The lure of money is in their blood. Earl Browder is lured by something vastly bigger, vastly more important: by a vision of a society in which there is no exploitation, no oppression, no poverty, no slums, where everybody is enjoying a beautiful life under a system where all wealth belongs to those who produce it and all society consists of producers only. He too wishes to rise but his rise is of a different nature. He perfects himself in order to be able to work more effectively among his fellow workers. He learns to teach others. He develops mentally in order to bring enlightenment to those who are exploited by big business and oppressed by its State organizations. His ambition is both personal and social: He wishes to rise with the rise of a great labor movement capable of transforming the world.

BROWDER FIGHTS WAR

He is 23 years old when the war breaks out. He understands the nature of the war. He takes his socialism seriously. Unlike some Socialists who join hands with their respective governments to help it win the war, he thinks that it is the duty of a Socialist to oppose the war. He realizes that the war is being fought between two coalitions of powers, each of which is out for markets, for colonies, for sources of raw material, for greater privilege to dominate the world. He knows that there is no idealistic motive back of the war on either side and that the main motive is the profits of the capitalist magnates.

When America joined the war in the spring of 1917, Earl Browder kept his head and his nerve. He was opposed to the United States participating in the imperialist war. He knew that the government was wrong in joining the war for the interests of the House of Morgan. He circulated his views against the war at every chance. The Democratic administration of Woodrow Wilson was hot on his trail. He was arrested in May, 1917, and, except for periods out on bail, was

kept in prison until November, 1920.

FACED WAR CRISIS

In his nomination speech Robert Minor said: "Whatever candidate enters this national election must be a man who is able to face the crisis of war—and our candidate is one who has faced it, not as the powers of Wall Street would have preferred, but by a rousing cry to the workers of America that they must fight against the war! Our candidate is one who already has known the inside of prisons in the fight against war." For opposing the war he spent two years and three months in Leavenworth and other prisons.

Revolutionists in prison do not despair. They do not brood. They consider a prison term as one of the incidents of a revolutionary career. They use the time to study, to write, to become better revolutionists.

For a period of nine months, between October, 1918, and July, 1919, Earl Browder was out on bail pending an appeal. By that time he had changed his views on the Syndicalist League. He had learned something vital in the previous year.

THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION

The Bolshevik revolution of November, 1917, had taken place; the workers under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party had seized power and started taking over factories, mines and mills. They had begun to repel the attacks of the former exploiters who organized counter-revolutionary bands with the aid of foreign governments (France, England, Japan, and the United States).

He realized that a revolution without a strong state power was an impossibility. He realized that the theory of syndicalism, which is opposed to political action before the revolution and to a strong centralized government during the revolution, was in open contradiction to the revolution in Russia. He had to say to himself that either the Syndicalists were right and the revolution in Russia all wrong, or that if the revolution in Russia was right—and it seemed to him that it was—then there was no place for Earl Browder in the Syndicalist ranks.

THE LEFT SOCIALISTS

He had left the Socialist Party in 1912 because it seemed to him that the Socialist Party was moving to the Right. But in St. Louis, at the national convention of the Socialist Party, an anti-war platform was adopted under the leadership of a well-known Cleveland Socialist, Charles Ruthenberg. The party was placed on a Left platform. True, many leaders of the party deviated from the course laid down by the St. Louis convention, but there was a Left wing which was carrying on the tradition of real Socialism. Earl Browder re-entered the Socialist Party and began to organize the Left wing in the Midwest. That was during the brief interval in his imprisonment.

Here we see another side of the man. The labor movement is supreme. The organization of the workers is the highest task. If the doors of Leavenworth will close behind him in a day or two, then all the more reason for continuing his activities in the ranks of the party while he is free. Earl Browder launches a weekly paper, *The Workers' World*, of which he becomes the editor—his first official job in the Socialist movement.

ONCE MORE IN JAIL

Again he was clamped into jail, just in time to prevent his personal participation in something which was of momentous importance in the history of the American labor movement, the formation in the summer of 1919 of the Communist Labor Party, one of the forerunners of the Communist Party of the United States.

This was the culmination of many years' work in the Socialist movement. It was an expression of the devotion of true Socialists to the Socialist ideal. During the summer of 1919 the Left wing was being hounded in the Socialist Party. The Right-wing leaders, headed by the late Morris Hillquit, made up their minds to "purge" the Socialist Party of all fighting elements. The Right-wing leaders were violently opposed to the Soviet Union, to the workers' revolution, to the seizure of power by the workers in any country. The fighting elements were expelled from the Socialist Party, or denied the right to express their true Socialist ideas. So well did Earl Browder organize the Left wing in the Midwest that he carried with him the Kansas, Nebraska and Western Missouri state organizations of the Socialist Party into the Communist Labor Party.

(To be continued.)