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**Age Policy
in War
Production**

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EARL BROWDER

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This pamphlet is an abridgement of an address by Earl Browder to a meeting of production workers and trade union officials at Hotel Diplomat, New York, on February 23, 1943.

Wage Policy in War Production

By EARL BROWDER

I AM very happy to address such a representative gathering of trade unionists. I want to talk about some of the problems of production, problems which are very vital to all of us, to our entire country and to the world. The war is being fought on the basis of production. Our country has the greatest productive economy of any country in the world. It would seem that we should be well fixed for the war. But we find, more than a year after our official entrance into the war, our country is still not able to make full use of its economy. I want to discuss some of the reasons for that and what we can do to remedy it.

I saw a very interesting editorial the other day in the Hearst newspapers. The editorial pointed out the importance of our war production and said the American workers are not doing enough to get this production out. The editorial writer said—look at Russia, they are producing marvelously, they are working long hours, they are working hard, without any disputes about wages. Why can't American workers do the same? When Mr. Hearst begins to ask us to look at Russia and copy Russia, it is permissible, I think, for me to speak a few words about the Soviet Union at a trade union meeting in introducing the subject of production.

First of all I want to say that Mr. Hearst is too radical. We cannot follow the example of the Soviet Union. We have to find our own way because our system is different in this

country. In the Soviet Union they have what is called socialism. In the United States we have what we call capitalism. In the Soviet Union they are producing in a socialist way. Here we have to find out how to produce in a capitalist way for this war. So Mr. Hearst is wrong when he tells you to copy Russia, even though we can learn much from Russia about production, because our first problem in this country is how to produce for war under capitalism, and that we *cannot* learn from Russia. The difference shows itself immediately when we examine wages.

One reason why in the Soviet Union wages do not constitute a very serious problem in production is because there the worker knows that even if he doesn't get wages that he might think he ought to have, at any rate, what he doesn't get remains in the hands of the government—his government, and is used for the war and for nothing else. Therefore, as long as he gets enough wages to purchase his regular ration of food and clothing, and that's all he can spend his money for anyway during the war, he doesn't care much about any more money, for if he had it he would only put it into government bonds anyway. It is his government, the same government that owns the industries and is going to take care of him and his children after the war. We haven't got that in this country. In this country we have capitalism. The factories, the industries belong to the capitalist class, and what we give up in wages does not go to the government. It goes into the private pockets of a group of capitalists, a part of whom (the National Association of Manufacturers) are trying to sabotage our government today, and have organized the majority of Congress against the President and against the war effort. Why should we want to give up wages to private industrialists? In fact, it is not patriotic in America to sacrifice your wages.

Regardless of what our system is, capitalist or socialist, we share with the workers in the Soviet Union one great interest—defeat of Hitler and the Axis. Whether we think capitalism is the better system, or socialism, that is an idle question now for the duration of the war. We don't even debate it because we are in this war and we have to win it the way we are, and in the United States we have got to win this war under the capitalist system. Therefore we have to find out how to make the capitalist system work. And since the capitalists themselves, who are in charge of that, are not doing a job that satisfies us, we have to help the capitalists to learn how to run their own system under war conditions.

It is really important that we achieve a maximum war production in this country. Our armies cannot effectively fight the enemy if we do not keep them fully supplied and it is the workers in the first place that have to keep them supplied. If you want to know how important it is to keep the flow of supplies going into the Army, just imagine what would be the situation now on the Eastern Front if the Red Army was not today getting more planes, more guns, more shells, than a year ago. Without expanding production of war materials behind it the Red Army could not be piling up these great victories which we celebrate today on the occasion of the anniversary of the founding of the Red Army.

The Red Army is able to roll up these victories because: the Soviet economy, the Soviet industry, the Soviet working class has learned how in the midst of war (in which they have lost a large part of their industrial territory and have 40,000,000 or 50,000,000 or more of their population engulfed behind the lines of the invaders, have had their cities ruined) to so conduct their economy that today they are turning out more war production than they were a year ago and twice as much as they were two years ago. They have advantages over there

that we have not. But if they can do so much, we should be able to do more than we are doing.

The Russian workers do not have any trouble about capitalists, the profit system, and all the things that stand in our way and bedevil us. We will not worry about that now, either; we will take our capitalists as we find them and try to do our best with them. We will postpone until some indefinite post-war period the basic problem of capitalism. Producing for war under this capitalist system and with capitalists as the effective managers with the last word about everything that goes on in the plant and its production, we find out that the great knowledge the working class has about how to improve production—and we do have knowledge about how to improve production—is very difficult to use. The employers don't like to accept suggestions from the workers; they say management is their business; the workers had better keep their noses out of it.

Early in the war there was officially adopted the program to set up labor-management production committees. The government blessed the idea; management at least gave a grudging assent, and the labor unions were enthusiastic for it and labor went out to increase production. The experience of labor has not been a happy one, and today I am sorry to say that in all my survey of labor-management production committees, I found only a handful that were really functioning in anything like the way that they should. We have about 1,600 or 2,000 such committees on paper, which is less than 20 per cent, certainly, of the plants which have war orders; but of these, not more than one out of ten gives any appreciable results in improving our war production. One of the main reasons for that has been that the employers have surrendered the leadership of their class to that small section among them who are against the development of labor-man-

agement committees; they are afraid you workers might get too ambitious if you learn something about management; they are so short-sighted in their greed for profits that they are actually penalizing increased production, rewarding sloth and indifference and punishing improvement of production. This is above all expressed in current employers' wage policies.

Last November I issued a pamphlet on war production problems in which I tried to point out how some of these problems could be solved. I pointed out that the proper wage policy (once we accept the principle of wage stabilization) for the expansion of war production required increased earnings for every worker to correspond with the increased production.

It is on that principle that I want to speak mainly tonight; this is a principle which corresponds to the interests of workers; it corresponds to the *true* interests of the capitalists; it corresponds to the interests of the government; it corresponds to the interests of winning the war as quickly and cheaply as possible.

There can be no maximum utilization of the economy of this country for the war until we straighten out this wage question and establish this principle—that since wage rates are stabilized, stabilization must prevent reduction in wage rates as well as increase in wage rates; that wages are to be the expression of the prevailing rate of reward based on production, and, as production goes up, earnings must go up correspondingly; that the best wage policy is one which gives an added incentive to increase production, so that with a certain higher degree of increased productivity goes a rise even in the rates upon which earnings are based, because of the reduction in costs thereby achieved.

If collective bargaining relationships were operated by the employers without resistance, and if this wage principle were

established, we could have such an increase in production in this country that would startle everybody; we could have a general increase in productivity that would give us in the course of six months or a year twice as much war production as we have today.

For the workers that would mean, under this principle, at least twice as much wages. Don't let any *New York Times* economist worry you about what you would do with those wages. High wages do not cause inflation. If you buy too much of anything with those wages, just let the government ration those things so that you cannot buy too much. And when they ration you, let them ration Park Avenue also.

For the employer that would be a fine thing. He would not only have twice as much production, which means twice as much profits, he would have more than twice as much profits, because he would have only one overhead for two productions, and could afford to give labor an incentive above the regular wage rate.

For the government—could it ask anything better than that we produce twice as much for the war as we are doing now? All this requires employer-labor cooperation. But the employers resist this.

Some people think that the way to get cooperation with the employers is to agree with everything they have to say. I can't believe that. I think if labor is to achieve cooperation with the employer, we have to talk "cold turkey" to him. I think we have to show him that we have got something to say about this production problem and we are going to insist on our point of view, because it is more in the interest of the bosses and his profits than his own illiterate point of view. It is strange but true that the working class of this country has the task to force better profits on unwilling employers.

Most employers are patriotic, they want to do the right

thing for the war, but they don't know how, and, because they don't know how, they surrender leadership of their class to a small group of unpatriotic employers who lead them into the old paths of class struggle. And because they were all trained in the old way of grabbing little things for profits, squeezing everything possible out of labor, they don't know how to work under war conditions, and we have to teach them how. Captain Rickenbacker and the N.A.M. are not only fighting against the trade unions, but also against even the narrow interests of the employers, and, above all, against better war production.

We will find it necessary to talk tough with such employers to teach them. But we must always remember that we are in reality fighting in their interest, and in the national interest as well as that of labor, and that more and more employers are going to come over to our side of this question. And when and as employers come over to our point of view, we must welcome their cooperation. Let us not make the same kind of mistake Captain Rickenbacker and the N.A.M. are making, of carrying over old methods of class struggle into this new time of national unity for the war. We must have no prejudices. The moment any employer shows willingness to do the right thing we must make it clear that he has 100 per cent support and cooperation from labor. But, while we are meeting the attacks of the Rickenbackers, and teaching them the error of their ways, we must be able to talk tough to them.

It seems to me that the union which has most clearly developed the correct wage policy for the war period is the United Electrical. From the first days of the war it stood for increased production, and for correlating wage-earnings to production, on the basis of labor-management cooperation. Its efforts along this line have been models for the labor movement. The Statement by the General Officers, in *U.E. News*

of January 16, outlining policies for wage negotiations in 1943, are sound, especially the Summation, which says:

"To sum up, wage considerations this year must be based upon:

"First, stabilization of the economy through an over-all production and economic program.

"Second, immediate establishment by the W.L.B. of a wage formula to remove the gross inequity between wage rates and the cost of living, such formula to be sufficiently flexible to keep pace with the rising living costs.

"Third, increases to remove unjustifiable and disruptive wage differentials.

"Fourth, negotiation of definite, detailed procedure for putting the principle of equal pay for equal work for women into practice.

"Fifth, protection of rates and increased earnings for incentive and day workers alike for increased output.

"Sixth, the rescinding of Executive Order 9240 on over-time."

I find one weakness only, in the arguments that back up this summation of policy; that is, not enough emphasis upon and backing up of the fifth point, which, in the long run, will be found to be the most important. Throughout the labor movement we have not fully realized the great possibilities of this question, based upon already established governmental policy, and therefore we have not done enough to put it into practice. Many wage-increases which have been agreed upon by the employers and rejected by the Labor Board need not even have been referred to the Board if they had been based upon increased production which was already achieved but not recognized in computing wages; when these increases were based upon cost-of-living arguments instead of production ar-

guments, then they had to go before the Board. While we are fighting out before the Board the question of cost-of-living, which is certainly important, there is no reason why we should refuse to gain increases based on production which need not go before the Board.

It may be of value to share with you a written discussion on this question which I had with one of the most capable workers in this field. He wrote me about some points to be clarified in my pamphlet, *Production for Victory*, and I replied on the main question of wage-production relationship. He has kindly agreed to the publication of the correspondence, which follows:

"Dear Mr. Browder:

"I have read your excellent pamphlet, *Production for Victory*. Permit me to offer a bit of criticism of one section, that dealing with 'Piece Rates and Incentive Wage.'

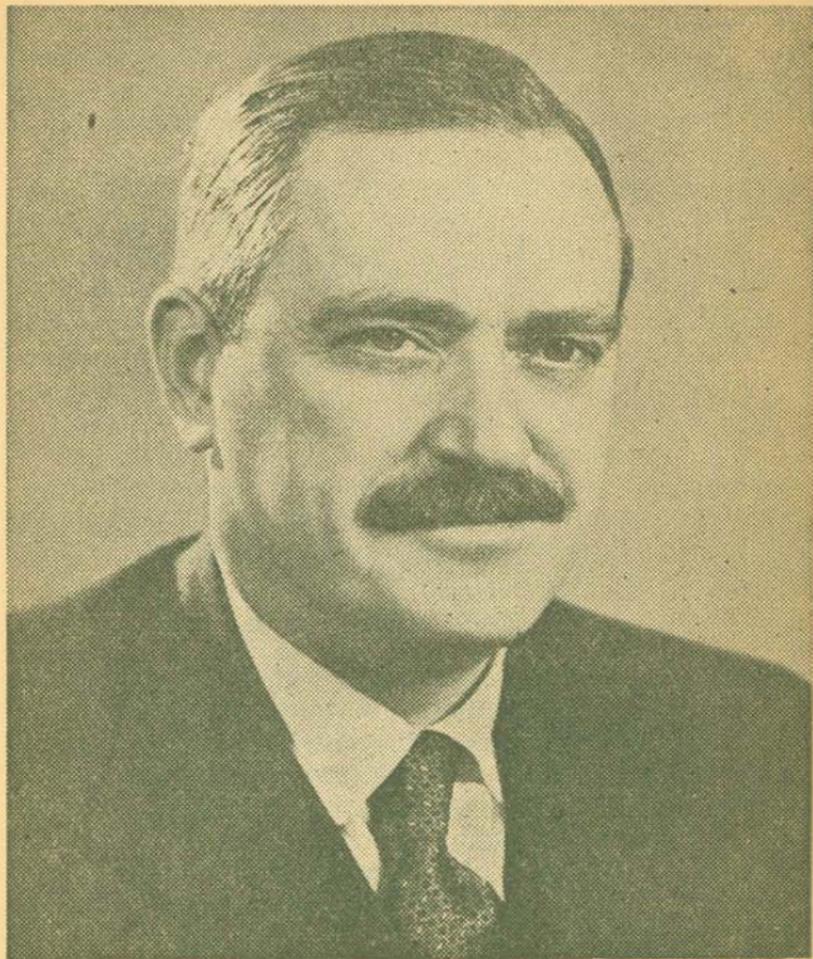
"On page 24, you state:

"The War Labor Board ruling on wages establishes that, in general, wage increases will have to receive the special permission of the War Labor Board, which will not be given except in very special circumstances. *But this order specifically excludes the necessity of such permission for wage increases which are directly based upon increases in production.*

"The underlined sentence does not correspond with the facts. You undoubtedly have reference to the W.L.B. General Order No. 5, Section D. That General Order reads as follows:

"Wage adjustments may be made in the rates of individual employees, without approval of the National War Labor Board, if they are incident to the application of the terms of an established wage agreement or to established wage rate schedules covering the work assignments of employees and are made as a result of:

"a. Individual promotions or reclassifications.



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“*b.* Individual merit increases within established rate ranges.

“*c.* Operation of an established plan of wage increases based upon length of service.

“*d.* Increased productivity under piecework or incentive plans.

“*e.* Operation of an apprentice or trainee system.

“The Board further finds that adjustments of wages made under this order should not result in any substantial increase of the level of costs and shall not furnish a basis either to increase price ceilings of the commodity or service involved or to resist otherwise justifiable reductions in such price ceilings.’

“INTERPRETATION NO. 1 OF GENERAL ORDER NO. 5

“The fixing of a piece-rate which was heretofore set only tentatively for trial purposes, and the re-setting of a piece-rate which was found to have been set in the first instance so as to yield less than the regularly established or normal amount prevailing in the plant for that type of job, are each “wage adjustments . . . incident to the application of the terms of an established wage agreement or to established wage rate schedules” within the meaning of General Order No. 5, and may therefore be made without approval of the National War Labor Board.’

“Under certain piece-work and incentive plans, as provided in the ‘terms of an established wage agreement,’ an increase in productivity will result either in a direct increase in earnings under the existing rate, or it will call for a stepping up of his rate. Example: a worker gets 10 cents per hundred pieces. If he produces 150 pieces, he will earn 15 cents. No change in the rate is necessary. Or take another example: So long as a worker is producing 100 pieces an hour, he will be

paid at the rate of 50 cents an hour, but if his production goes up to 150 pieces an hour, he will be paid at the rate of 60 cents an hour. This incentive step-up in the rate does not require approval of the War Labor Board according to General Order No. 5d. Nor does a change in the piece-work rate, if the original piece-work rate was a temporary one, and one that yielded less than the regularly established or normal amount prevailing in the plant for that type of job, require the approval of the W.L.B., according to 'Interpretation No. 1 of General Order No. 5.'

"The above is all the W.L.B. has issued in regard to the relation of wage rates to productivity. (I am enclosing for your consideration the first six General Orders of the W.L.B.) You can see therefore that 'wage increases' as differentiated from 'wage earnings' under piece-work and incentive plans, are not 'specifically excluded' from the requirement of W.L.B. approval if they are based on increased productivity.

"You state in the same paragraph:

" 'Under this ruling, even day-wage rates which can be directly tied to norms of production can be raised, and they should be raised to the same degree that production is raised above that norm.'

"That they should be raised all workers will agree with you, but that they can be raised without the approval of the W.L.B. is another matter. The truth is that any increase in day rates based on the productivity factor does require the approval of the Board. Strange enough, at this late date, the Board has not yet rendered an opinion on this question. Too few of the disputes before the Board utilized this factor of increased productivity as an argument for an increase in wages. There is now before the Board a case where my union bases its entire claim for an increase in wages on the argu-

ment that since Dec. 7, 1941, production per man hour has increased by 35 per cent, whereas the wages (and in this case, because the workers are all on day rates, the earnings) have remained stationary.

"You state further:

" 'Since this is true of day rates, it is clear that piece-rate earnings under wage stabilization must also increase as production is increased.'

"I have already pointed out that it is *not* true of day rates. Nothing that the W.L.B. has issued in any way affects 'piece-rate earnings.' Here again you fail to differentiate between 'piece-rates' and 'piece-rate earnings.' Nor for that matter has the W.L.B. issued any ruling on 'earnings' so long as no wage increase is involved. That means that the piece-worker or incentive worker can earn as much as his productive effort will permit without interference from the W.L.B., provided, however, that the piece-work rate or incentive rate is not cut.

"In the next paragraph you state:

" 'This means that all wages are going to be tied to productivity now.'

"I have already pointed out that this is not the case.

"The remainder of that paragraph points out:

" 'Conversely, we must insist that all increases of production are immediately reflected in an increase in earnings. If we do not fight for that principle, we fail to fight for stabilization.'

"This principle obviously should be a guide to trade union action before the War Labor Board. We are only just beginning to insist that this principle be adopted by the Board.

A great deal will depend upon the test case that I have mentioned. It would be preferable that we first fight out successfully on the basis of a concrete case rather than urge the Board to adopt an abstract principle. I should think that if we are successful in this test case we could then proceed to request the War Labor Board to adopt a General Order to the effect that any cut in earnings during the war period as a result of a cut in piece-rates or as a result of new time studies in incentive plans is not in the public interest and is therefore a violation of the Executive Order 9250.

"In that regard, we succeeded in one case to have the Board direct as follows:

" 'After the above blanket increase of six cents per hour in piece-work rates, the present piece-work rates shall be frozen during the life of this contract.'

"You should know that the present Wage Stabilization Policy of the War Labor Board, a copy of which I am enclosing herewith, rests almost exclusively in tying wages to the cost of living and establishing the peace-time standards of January 1, 1941, as the living standard to be maintained for the war period. The trade unions unsuccessfully fought against such a Wage Stabilization Policy, but not always for the best of reasons, certainly not always in the interests of stabilization. The weaknesses of this policy are apparent. It is a static policy, based entirely on the desire of the War Labor Board to make a contribution to the fight on inflation. That such a policy will not *per se* stop inflation was not apparent to the Board members. On the other hand, this Wage Stabilization Policy fails entirely to contribute to the effective prosecution of the war, because no incentive is held out to the workers to increase production. Therefore, I should think that the trade unions should concentrate on the problem of getting the War Labor

Board to change its Wage Stabilization Policy by tying wages to productivity.

"On page 26, you state:

" 'Now some people may confuse the incentive wage with the bonus system.

" 'Bonus system are essentially an arbitrary method of distributing special rewards for special performance. They do not really encourage any increase in productivity and often produce such results disruptive of production increases as illustrated in the case of one plant where the man who poured the metal got a \$6 bonus, while the janitor who carted the scrap away got \$22. Incentive wage rates, on the other hand, are directly tied up with production and are subject to the same contractual obligations on the part of the employer as wages in general.'

"I am not entirely in agreement with the above. There is no sharp line of demarcation between an incentive system and a bonus system. Very often there is a combination of both and one should know that there are a great number of incentive plans. The example you cite does not prove that a bonus system as such was faulty, but that its application in a particular case produced inequities. The same inequities can result from a faulty incentive plan and very often we find in the same plant where a single incentive plan is used, two workers with equal productive effort on different job operations earning different amounts. A great deal of collective bargaining in a plant revolves around the workings of the incentive and bonus plans. There are continual adjustments that have to be made so as to produce an equitable result based on a norm of productive effort.

"Yours very truly,

"N. B."

Now I will read you my answer:

"Pardon the delay in answering your letter of January 11, due to pressure of work.

"It is my opinion that the basic argument of my pamphlet, that the War Labor Board policy laid down in General Order No. 5 establishes the principle of relating wages to production, is correct. It is, however, quite true that I did not give the necessary detailed analysis of the official documents to make this clear. Your letter, therefore, brings me to repair that omission.

"Under General Order No. 5, an agreement that the norm of production under day-rate scales already established is 'x' units, and that production above that norm shall be remunerated at 'y' rate, would clearly come under paragraph *b*, which says that 'individual merit increases within established rate ranges' can be made 'without approval of the National War Labor Board.'

"Paragraph *d* exempts from the necessity of approval such 'wage adjustments' as may be made as a result of 'increased productivity under piece-work or incentive plans.' If the English language means anything, this means that the War Labor Board leaves labor and management free to reach and apply any agreement on wages which fastens the rate of wages to the prevailing norm of production.

"Whether day-rate or piece-rate is the prevailing mode of calculating wages, General Order No. 5 clearly establishes the policy of not hindering incentives to productivity, in setting forth the overall limits of all enumerated exceptions to its control, by stating that 'adjustments made under this order shall not result in any substantial increase of the level of costs.' This formulation is the clearest expression of the principle of relating wages directly to production.

"There need be no confusion between the categories of 'earnings' and 'wage rates'; wage-rates are clearly intended to be stabilized in relation to production-norms, but earnings

(the cumulative application of rates to performances) are clearly intended to expand with increase in production whether that is measured in time (increase of hours) or in intensity (increased productivity); or whether its rate-measurement is by day-rate or piece-rate.

"If these principles are not yet clearly established in practical application, that is only the inevitable consequence of insufficient clarity of understanding and energy in application of these principles from the side of organized labor.

"It is my impression that all the objections you raised to my formulations are based entirely upon the fact that they might be interpreted as a statement of what is the established understanding and practice of the War Labor Board and the labor movement, whereas the facts are obviously that understanding and practice are clearly lagging behind the principles set forth. I must acknowledge that I did not clearly enough make this distinction. These principles must still be established in practice, and in the understanding of the labor movement, the government, and the public. But I insist that a sufficient foundation has already been laid in General Order No. 5 to accomplish this, given proper and energetic application from the side of the labor movement.

"This position is further buttressed by the fact that the interests of the nation, of war production, clearly lie in this direction. No arguments directed toward 'limitation of purchasing power' as an anti-inflation measure can operate against this principle, for limitation of effective demand upon the commodity market is obviously the function of the rationing system and not of wage-limitations."

Now, let me add to my letter the observation that we should not blame the War Labor Board for not applying the principle of relating wages to production, if the labor movement does not press this principle and base its arguments thereon. We do not need to ask the Labor Board to adopt the principle, for it is already adopted in principle. We must

ask the Board to apply it. Of course, if we find out later that the Board itself is not fully ready to enforce its own principles, then we will have a new and different problem. But we cannot say that is the case now.

Now the main practical task is for us all to become better "labor lawyers" than we have ever been before, and argue our case better before the public, before the employers, before the War Labor Board.

One further word on the bonus system versus incentive wage. The main point is this, that all the old-time methods of increasing production which labor and the trade unions quite rightfully rebelled against, because they were arbitrary and harmful, were tied up with what was called the "bonus system." We should make clear our opposition to all those old methods, by absolutely refusing to carry over the old term "bonus system" to apply to any of the new and unobjectionable methods of computing the "incentive wage-rates." And let us remember this too, that if we find in our experience that "incentive wage-rate systems" are not worked out very carefully in the interests of the workers as well as of production, then the old opprobrium that sticks to "bonus" will rise to discredit even the better methods. Bad applications can ruin the reputation of good principles.

We still are lacking a national organization of the nation's economy for the war effort. The President's seven-point program against inflation has not been fully applied except in its restrictions on labor, although the President warned that it would fail unless strictly applied on all seven points. We still have no over-all planning and control of war production, or of the national economy as a whole. We still lack even the necessary full rationing system to control the flow of necessities of life and to guarantee their supply to the working population.

Under these circumstances it is clear that the trade unions cannot relax for one moment in the most zealous protection and promotion of the workers' money income from wages, consistent with the main war-economy policies adopted by the Government and accepted by the labor movement.

Wage policy can be made to contribute to the expansion of war production, provided it takes into account the needs of labor, the prime mover in production. Such policy is consistent with the interests of the employers, and of the nation as a whole. Therefore the trade unions are performing not only their special function for labor, but also a patriotic duty to the nation, when they fight for such a wage policy.

A letter to Paul Ste. Marie, President of Ford Local 600 of the C.I.O., United Automobile Workers, replying to the latter's charge that the Communist Party was supporting the Bedaux system.

DEAR MR. STE. MARIE:

In the *Detroit News* of March 3, it is reported that you "took responsibility for issuing and circulating to war factories a leaflet attacking the Bedaux system of paying workers a bonus for extra production." Presumably this refers to the anonymous leaflet which attacked the Communist Party and myself by charging that we supported the Bedaux system.

Considering the possibility that you may have been misinformed, and thus rendered the victim of a hoax, allow me to give you the following information:

1. The Communist Party has never in any way endorsed the Bedaux system, nor has this writer either by name or by endorsement of the bonus system. We have specifically condemned the bonus system, and this condemnation was repeated in the pamphlet quoted by your leaflet.

2. In my pamphlet *Production for Victory*, I most certainly did not in any way endorse the Bedaux system. In fact, I spoke of the "notorious Bedaux System, Inc.," which is certainly not a complimentary reference. What I did speak of approvingly was a *new approach* being shown by production engineers, which admits past wrong attitudes toward labor and trade unions, and tries to find a new relationship based upon labor-management cooperation to fulfill a common patriotic duty.

3. The main point of my pamphlet which your leaflet attacked, was the establishment as a fact that the President's wage stabilization order does not and should not hinder the expansion of wage earnings by workers to correspond to

increases in production. I assumed the agreement of the trade unions to increased production programs, and insisted that wage-earnings must increase in proportion. I proved that this principle is contained in the War Labor Board's interpretation of the wage-stabilization order.

Now permit me to ask you two questions.

1. Do you oppose any welcome to a change in attitude of production engineers, and their recognition of workers' rights and trade unions? That is, do you prefer that they should retain their old hostility?

2. Are you opposed to the increased production program; or are you opposed to the workers' wage-earnings being increased in proportion to increases in production?

If your answer is no to both questions, then you have no reason to attack the Communist Party or my pamphlet. If your answer is yes, then you are fighting not the Communists but the main policy of the whole labor movement on production and wages. The Bedaux system has nothing to do with the issue, except that some production engineers connected with the organization have *changed their attitude* to come into line with the labor movement.

Old prejudices must not be permitted to stand in the way of the cooperation necessary to win the war.

Misrepresentation in such issues as this does not help the workers, and is an obstacle to the whole nation and therefore unpatriotic.

May I ask you to correct your position as to these questions in the same public manner as you made unjustified attacks upon me and the Communist Party.

Sincerely,

EARL BROWDER.

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