

EARL BROWDER

THEORY  
AS A GUIDE  
TO ACTION

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# THEORY

## AS A GUIDE TO ACTION

By EARL BROWDER

WE ARE celebrating this evening the fifteenth anniversary of the Workers School, a very important event, indeed, and one which can well be taken as the occasion for not only speaking of the school's splendid work in the past, but also, and more important, for deepening our understanding of the future role which it must play. It is toward this future work that I wish in the main to direct my remarks.

"Theory to the masses" has been the guiding slogan of the Workers School. More than ever, and more concretely practical in character, must the Workers School apply this directive in its work. Progress in this direction will demand that the school shall be woven into the everyday life and problems of the mass movement, and of our Party, which operates ever more in the center of the mass movement.

Our theory is the understanding of the laws that govern history in its development, the laws of social change. We are interested in these laws, not from idle curiosity, but because we find ourselves in a rapidly changing world, torn between forces of reaction and retrogression on the one hand, and of progress on the other; we find

ourselves on the whole helpless victims of the reactionary forces except to the degree that we arm ourselves with fundamental understanding, with theory. We find that if our action is based only upon our own experience, if it is not illuminated with theory, then it is self-defeating, it runs into blind alleys, it loses its way. But with theory as our guide, theory which summarizes the experiences of history, which is the accumulation of working class experience over the generations, then our action draws into its support the deepest forces among the masses, it strikes out upon the broad highway of progress, it is inspired by the confidence of sure knowledge.

Recently our brother Party of the Soviet Union, the great Party of Lenin and Stalin, has inaugurated a great reconstruction of its educational system. There is much that we can learn from their experience. Avoiding all tendencies to mechanical copying from one country to another, we will find great gains in utilizing the leading principles of their educational reconstruction, which is taking place around the new book, *The History of the C.P.S.U.* The resolution of November 14,\* containing the directives for this reconstruction, is worthy of exhaustive study. I will speak on a few points only, which seem to me of the most immediate and decisive importance for us in the United States.

#### MASTERING MARXIST-LENINIST THEORY

First, the task is placed for the broadest circles of the Party of mastering theory; this can no longer be left as a task of specialization for small circles. The following most important declaration is made:

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\* See *The Communist International*, No. 12, 1938, p. 1135, Workers Library Publishers, New York.

“It is wrong to believe that only a small circle of practical workers can cope with the task of mastering theory. The mastering of Marxist-Leninist theory is a matter of accumulation of time and effort. . . . All that is necessary to master the theory of Marxism-Leninism is to have the desire and to exercise persistence and firmness in the effort to attain this objective.”

This is a necessary conclusion from the theory which deals with social development as a field for scientific investigation, subject to ascertainable laws, the understanding of which creates the possibility of guiding and controlling that social development for socially-determined aims. All remnants of an esoteric and mystical atmosphere must be cleared from about the theory of Marxism-Leninism. It is a science, as much as physics, chemistry, biology, and can be mastered with the same thoroughness by every individual who possesses sufficiently the desire, and exercises the requisite persistence and firmness.

Second, when given the students possessing these qualities, the task of mastering the theory of Marxism-Leninism will be advanced with a degree of rapidity and thoroughness that will be determined by the *quality* of the text and the organization of the study itself, that is, by the quality of the guidance and student response. Thus we place a tremendous responsibility upon our educational workers who must facilitate in every way the task of the student to grasp and to master the theory, in its highest development by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, not as abstractions and formulae, but as living principles which illuminate every problem of our own life, and thereby guide our own actions.

The fundamental requirement for *higher quality* of

study and school work is independent study of verified and authoritative texts (which represent the highest quality of leadership in a centralized form), and the organic application of the theory to current problems, international, national and local. Marxism-Leninism is:

“... a theory which, as every science, is continually developing and improving and which does not hesitate to replace individual outdated propositions and conclusions with new propositions and conclusions corresponding to new historical conditions.”

Third, the old methods of study, and the organization of courses (including the curriculum of schools), require the most critical overhauling in the light of these great tasks. The arbitrary and harmful divisions that have been allowed to develop between phases of Marxism-Leninism must be dissolved; Leninism is not an independent theory separated from Marxism, from dialectical and historical materialism, from Party history; these are not independent disciplines and theories, but represent the indivisible unity, integrity and continuity of Marxism-Leninism.

This is a big and profound task. Its solution calls for the active cooperation of the broadest circles of students, teachers, propagandists and administrators. It requires that the question be placed fundamentally, that it be studied concretely and in detail, that it be solved not mechanically and arbitrarily but as a living process that draws in the whole body of persons engaged in educational work, the whole active strata of the Party and its close supporters.

These three leading thoughts I have taken from the plans for educational reconstruction of our brother Party

in the Soviet Union, selecting them as the points which I consider will lead us most quickly and concretely to the fruitful consideration of our own specific tasks in this field. They give but a beginning in this direction, and by no means adequately outline all the far-reaching phases of the problem. We will find it necessary and valuable to extend and deepen our examination of the problem constantly and over a long period. Each step will throw new light on the succeeding ones to be taken.

#### A GREAT BOOK OF MARXISM-LENINISM

The main instrument for the educational reconstruction in the Soviet Union is the new *History of the C.P.S.U.* This great book, produced by the Central Committee with the personal participation of Comrade Stalin, will undoubtedly take its place as the greatest summation and integration of Marxist-Leninist theory. Its first edition of six million copies, supplemented by tens of millions in newspaper and magazine publication, indicates its importance to the builders of the first socialist society, whose victories mark an epoch precisely because they were the result of the consistent application and development of Marxist-Leninist theory.

Practice is the verification of theory, as theory is the guide to practical action. It is inevitable that the greatest experience in the application and further development of Marxist-Leninist theory in practice shall have the most profound and far-reaching results of universal validity. It is inevitable that the new *History* provides the Communists of the United States, and all students of Marxism-Leninism, with the indispensable textbook for our task in mastering theory.

Doubtless you are informed of the decision of the re-

cent National Committee meeting to publish an American edition of 100,000 copies, for distribution at the extraordinarily low price of 40 cents per copy. From this decision you can see that we take seriously the idea which I have expressed here of the broadest democratization of our education, of the slogan "Theory to the masses." We are endeavoring to eliminate every obstacle that might prevent this fundamental textbook from reaching the hands of every single person seriously interested in study, in mastering theory. With this book we will raise up a whole generation schooled in the best thought produced by humanity.

Marxist-Leninist theory is overcoming that long-standing split between thought and action, between theory and practice, which is one of the chief characteristics of bourgeois society. Capitalism separated the worker from his tools; our theory is the only instrument that shows the way to reunite them, on a higher plane. Capitalism separated the city from the country, industry from agriculture, and set them in antagonism one to the other; our theory alone promises to dissolve this disastrous contradiction. Capitalism sharply divides the population into classes, and sets them into struggle against one another; only our theory, guiding the masses of the people, leads to the classless society, to the brotherhood of man. Capitalism even sets off the human faculties against one another, creates a contradiction between thought and action, between theory and practice, between thinking and working, and disintegrates the human personality. Under bourgeois society the very word "theory" is made synonymous with "futility," the "theoretical" with the "unpractical," the "theoretician" with the utopian "dreamers." Only Marxism-Leninism again restores the

human mind to its throne, creates a unified individual and a unified society, restores the tools to the workers, and reunites thought and action, theory and practice.

The present general movement throughout the world for the educational rearmament of the Communist Parties, and of the labor movement—the movement to master theory—is not disconnected from the world crisis. It is because the peoples of the world approach another great turning point in history, that the working class vanguard, the international Communist movement, taking up the task of leading the popular masses through the threatening storms to victory, looks to its preparedness, examines its equipment, begins systematic rearmament. And our arms for the coming struggles consist first and last of our arsenal of theory, of Marxism-Leninism.

#### OUR THEORY GUIDES US THROUGH CHANGE

It is in moments of crisis, of great changes, of historic turns, when there is revealed especially the utter inadequacy and harmfulness of all anti-Marxian theory. Our theory, as the science of social development, like all science universal in its validity, is alone able to provide an understanding of moments of change, to identify the forces involved and the laws of movement of these forces, to pass over from explanation of past changes to foreseeing of future changes—and thereby to direct and shape these changes and the destiny of humanity that is involved.

Our theory guides us through crises, through moments of great change, because it is the science of social development, it is the generalization of all past history, and forecasts future history. All other theories fall into bankruptcy precisely in the moments of great change,

because they take their foundation from that which itself is undergoing change, they are static, mechanical, idealistic, and do not see or understand the real moving forces of history. That is why, any individual, group, party or class, which is guided by any theory except Marxism-Leninism, finds its theory breaking up and failing in the moment of crisis and change.

Today all the old landmarks are drifting, breaking up, disappearing. The old world is in a constantly more profound chaos. For those with foundations only in the old order of things, it is a period of pessimism and despair, while those who would militantly defend the old order by stopping progress at all costs pass over to fascism—the bloody and brutal dictatorship of monopoly capital, smashing and destroying culture, science, the arts, and all civilization. For those, however, who are armed with the understanding of Marxist-Leninist theory, the way is lighted up through the deepest chaos, pessimism is dissolved, courage and enthusiasm inspire to struggle, with calm confidence in the certainty of victory.

That is because our theory discloses the bearer of the future society in the immortal and indestructible working class which, when armed with theory and understanding, is invincible.

That is because our theory discloses for us, in every obstacle or temporary defeat, the key to further progress and victory.

How many Americans, among them those who pride themselves upon their education, were thrown into panic and despair by the Munich betrayal! And the fascist powers counted upon just that as the main weapon for their further victories. But how quickly has the pene-

trating Marxist-Leninist theory enabled the international working class, and thereby the whole camp of world democracy, to begin gathering its forces even more solidly and broadly all-inclusive, to dissolve all panic and despair, and prepare for the more decisive battles ahead. The very defeats inflicted upon us by the Munich conspirators are transformed into weapons against them, the enemy is exposed before the eyes of the world in all his nakedness and is isolated from the masses of the people who, aroused as never before, begin to solidify their ranks for serious defense of democracy and peace.

When in the last elections, the combined reactionary camp of the Republican Party and the Garner Democrats were able, by demagogic promises and fantastic Red-baiting, to break some of the ranks of the progressive camp, drawing over hesitating and confused circles and creating apathy in others, thereby gaining some new positions of power, it was the power of Marxist-Leninist theory which enabled the advanced workers, and through them the whole democratic camp, quickly to recover from the temporary dismay, by disclosing the major strategic advantage that had been gained for them, by forcing the reactionary camp to call upon its reserves, to concede the main premise of the progressive program, and to enter into competition as to which camp really intends to and will realize jobs, security, democracy and peace. By this understanding there is made clear the task of unity of the working class and the democratic front, and also confidence and enthusiasm for the battle.

When the reactionary camp, with its agents among the masses, tries to confuse and paralyze the will of the masses, by posing the question, "Social security *or* national security," it is Marxist-Leninist theory which en-

ables the workers and democratic-minded people to answer with full confidence, "Not one without the other, but both social *and* national security," and to assume the leadership of the nation in the fight for both simultaneously.

When the reactionary camp raises the cry of "The nation *against* internationalism," in order to cover and assist their betrayal of the nation to international fascist banditry, it is our theory which enables the workers and all democrats to reply firmly and decisively, "Our nation, in firm alliance with all international forces of democracy and peace; the nation, to realize internationalism, the brotherhood of man."

When the reactionary camp spreads the poison of race hatreds and prejudices, with anti-Semitic and anti-Negro campaigns and pogroms, to further disintegrate the unity of the masses, it is Marxism-Leninism which arms the front lines of struggle against this reversion to the Dark Ages, and which unites in firmest solidarity the people of all races and nationalities in defense of culture and civilization. Nowhere more vividly than in America is it so clearly demonstrated that the internationalism of our theory, contrary to the charges of the reactionaries, is not the enemy of the nation, but its only guarantee against disruption by race-hatred.

When the reactionary camp appeals to the past, to tradition, to Americanism, as a weapon to fight against progress today, it is Marxist-Leninist theory which enables our Party to lead the American democratic camp in the most fruitful rediscovery of the rich history of our nation, with its wealth of revolutionary traditions and teachings, and to transform the great patriots and teachers of the past into our living helpers in the present. We

have restored Jefferson, Paine, Jackson and Lincoln, and the great companies that fought by their side in other days, to the masses of the America of today.

#### THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION OF MARXISM-LENINISM

The greatest contribution of all, which Marxist-Leninist theory has given to the masses, is *the Party*. The Communist Party is the organized theory, embodied in growing tens and hundreds of thousands of men and women, preserving and transmitting the experience and wisdom of past generations, enriching it by the experience of the present, transmitting it to the broadest masses, providing thereby the illumination, the guidance, the leadership, which will organize victory for the masses in their age-long struggle against the forces of darkness and reaction.

The Communist Party is not a sect, which separates its membership from the masses of the people. No, guided by Marxism-Leninism, our Party leads its members into ever-wider and more fruitful cooperation with the masses of the people and all their democratic and progressive organizations. It is not necessary to be a Party member, or even a sympathizer, to understand today what a powerful and growing influence the Communist Party has become on the side of every issue and cause of the masses of the people. Today there are millions who have learned to respect our Party and to welcome its cooperation, who yet do not agree with our ultimate program or understand our theory. Yet these millions should be told, and should understand, that we are able to help them so practically in the everyday struggle, precisely because of our ultimate program and our theory.

The Communist Party is the party of the working class. Its theory is founded upon the role of the working class

in uniting and leading the masses of the people; it draws its main strength from the ranks of the working class. But our Party also draws into itself the best from all strata of society, regardless of their class, and gives them that which their own class cannot—a conscious and fruitful collaboration in the further progress of the human race. The bearers and defenders of culture, from all classes, are being drawn into or under the influence of the Party of Marxism-Leninism, as inevitably as iron filings are drawn to a magnet.

#### THE ROLE OF THE WORKERS SCHOOL

It has been the great and historic role of the Workers School that it has been the outstanding institution in America which assumed the task of mastering the theory of Marxism-Leninism and transmitting this theory, with the ambition to master it, to the broadest masses.

It is my pleasant duty, at this gathering, on behalf of the National Committee of the Communist Party of the U.S.A., to congratulate the capable, loyal and hardworking staff of instructors and guides of the Workers School, who have made it a great, respected and loved institution, under the tireless and able leadership of the head of the school, Comrade Markoff. We want you to know that not only the whole Party, but hundreds of thousands around the Party, join in this appreciation of your work.

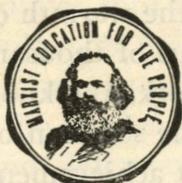
To the large and growing body of students of the Workers School, and the larger number of past students, our deep appreciation goes to you for your quenchless thirst for knowledge which is the foundation of the school's work, your tireless energy in its pursuit which has enabled the school to weather all storms and surmount all difficulties.

On this fifteenth anniversary of the Workers School, we gather in no spirit of smug satisfaction, to rest upon our laurels or bask in the warmth of mutual admiration. We are keenly conscious of thousands of weaknesses and shortcomings in our work. We know that we have taken but the first steps in the solution of our great tasks. We are celebrating our past achievements only to confirm our united determination to press forward with new enthusiasm and confidence, to a Workers School ever more worthy of its greatest teachers, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, never satisfied with anything less than the fullest mastery of their theory, a mastery of theory successfully submitted to the proof of practice in the establishment of a socialist America.

Schools in the following cities:

Cleveland Workers School 1234 Prospect Ave. Cleveland, O.	Workers School 32 E. 12th St. New York City
Stark Workers School 412 E. Pine St. Stark, Wash.	Cleveland Workers School 45 E. 12th St. Cleveland, Ill.
Baltimore Workers School 123 W. Franklin St. Baltimore, Md.	Workers School of Philadelphia 123 Walnut St. Philadelphia, Pa.
Hudson Branch School 445 Lenox Ave. New York City	Progressive Workers School 221 E. 12th St. Brooklyn, N. Y.
Brownsville Workers School 1231 12th Ave. Brooklyn, N. Y.	Progressive Labor School 12 Park St. Boston, Mass.

## WORKERS SCHOOL



35 East 12th Street  
New York City

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### Schools in the following cities:

Workers School  
35 E. 12th St.,  
New York City

Chicago Workers School  
431 S. Dearborn St.  
Chicago, Ill.

Workers School of  
Philadelphia  
1215 Walnut St.  
Philadelphia, Pa.

Pittsburgh Workers School  
527 Fifth Ave.  
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Progressive Labor School  
15 Essex St.  
Boston, Mass.

Cleveland Workers School  
1524 Prospect Ave.  
Cleveland, O.

Seattle Workers School  
915 E. Pine St.  
Seattle, Wash.

Baltimore Workers School  
322-24 W. Franklin St.  
Baltimore, Md.

Harlem People's School  
443 Lenox Ave.  
New York City

Brownsville Workers School  
1701 Pitkin Ave.  
Brooklyn, N. Y.