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# discussion bulletin

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July 22, 1959

Dear Comrade Swabeck:

I have read your article "The Third Chinese Revolution and Its Communes," in which you glorify the communes as a "superior type of socio-economic organization." You stated many instances to prove your point, such as "food production in 1958 . . . doubling the 1957 output," "crowded population has advanced from the malnutrition and famines of yore to a living diet today," "the most celebrated were the home made blast furnaces," "steel production was double" and "formation of communes came from the peasants themselves" .... etc.

Most of your information came from Gerald Clark, Canadian reporter, Lord John Boyd Orr, food authority and some official publications of the CCP.

You disagree with the position taken by Comrades Peng and Mei Lei-tar of Hongkong, and show your doubt of the information supplied by them by quoting Gerald Clark's words -- "A day of personal observation in Peking yields more than a year of second-hand guessing in the listening post of Hongkong." You also refute Mei's conclusion that the communes system in China is worse than the slave system of ancient Rome by asking him the following question: "What accounts for this incredible comparison with ancient Rome?" .... "during the entire Roman epoch very little progress was registered in the sphere of production. The tools of the cultivator retained their primitive form..... How does this compare with the giant strides made in Chinese production?"

Although I am a Chinese, but since I have been away from my native land for a number of years, I cannot give you my personal account of the present Chinese situation, yet I disagree with your way of depreciating the information and judgment of the Hongkong comrades by invoking Mr. Clark's statement. It may apply quite correctly to a non-Chinese, because most of them neither can read Chinese newspapers nor talk to Chinese people in Chinese, so the only information they can get is "second-hand guessing." But for the comrades in Hongkong, it is different. They read Chinese newspapers and magazines from China and talk to Chinese coming from China. And most of the people they talk to are pro-CP workers, overseas students (Chinese students from South-east Asia who go to China to study, and return home during their vacations), and even members of the CCP and its youth group. The information from these people, most of whom doubtless are strong supporters of Mao's Regime, should surely be given serious consideration. Mei Lei-Tar's article was mostly based on such information. Any Marxist analysis should be based on facts. Although I, with the help of Mr. Peter Schulz, translated Mei's article, I cannot defend his point without giving facts. So I wrote to Mei and received his letter recently. The following is the translation of his whole letter in which you may find certain facts which substantiate his viewpoint.

Sincerely yours,

L.

July 8, 1959

Dear L.:

From your letter we know that our comrades in the U.S. are having a heated discussion on the communes. We also held discussions on this subject but without big controversy, for we have more or less the same opinion (with the exception of Mah-ki). I have a feeling that some comrades in the U.S. are over-glorifying the present situation in China. This over-glorification often has an influence on the conclusions drawn from a discussion. Let us take up the subject of the increase of production. According to what J. wrote us, comrades in the U.S. thought that the organized labor after the communization would help increase socialist accumulation in China. Just look at the official figures, it would seem to be true. Moreover, we cannot get any correct figures to counterpose those of the CCP. If there were to be another "blossom and contend" campaign, I think we would get the true figures to prove our present estimation. However, according to the facts, we do know we should doubt the truthfulness of the increase of production. The food production was doubled last year in the official statistics, but this year, so far, according to the facts, has been one of famine and starvation. The situation is getting so serious that we dare not, but have to believe it, since most of the information concerning this situation comes from the pro-CCP or members of the CCP.

A Malayan-Chinese student, arriving recently at Hongkong via Hainan Islands (one of two biggest islands in south-east China, the other being Formosa) from Peking, told us that the food situation inside Peking is very bad; peasants in the Peking suburbs get only one steamed bread loaf a piece for each meal, while the old women get half a piece (steamed bread is the main food in Northern China as rice is in the South. An ordinary person should have three or four steamed bread loaves or eight ounces of rice for each meal). The situation in Hainan Island is even worse: peasants look like beggars, ill-fed and wearing rotten clothing; many are loitering in front of the restaurants to try to get food, in spite of the signs of "sold out" hanging on most of them.

The brother of a worker in Hongkong, a leader of the local CP's youth group, wrote to his brother that the chief of his village (Ching-yun Hsien in Kwangtung) had started to organize people to move out from his locality to escape famine. The brother of another worker in Hongkong, a secretary of the local youth group and a correspondent of the National Youth (a newspaper published by the CP's youth group), used to urge his brother to return to China. Naturally he would not speak anything against his motherland. Recently, however, as his whole family is living in starvation conditions, he wrote to his brother, saying: "The difficulty which we are confronted with at present is the most serious one since 1949." He hoped that his brother would send some salted fishes to their mother who has not had any meat diet for the last six months. They live in Chung-shan Hsien, which is claimed by the CCP as one of the most productive areas.

Some ex-workers in Hongkong (those left Hongkong and went back to their native village to participate in production) wrote us that the quota of rice for each peasant is only three or four ounces a day, which is not enough for two meals of rice soup. They eat rice soup in the messhall, which is quite a distance from where they work and by the time they get back to work, they are hungry. Despite of the yells and howls of their foremen, the peasants' enthusiasm in farmwork are lacking, being so weak physically.

Some workers who came back from China recently after visiting their families in China, told us that some peasants stole potato seeds at night which were just planted the same morning. Bananas and quinces on the nationalized farms are being stolen on a large scale by hungry peasants. Some mothers feed their children with the young buds of quince trees. Men in groups are searching the hills and mountains for wild fruits and grasses to feed themselves from hunger. They said the famine this year is just as bad as it was during the Japanese occupation. By the end of May thousands of peasants escaped to Canton from nearby villages; they slept in the railway station and along the lonely streets and small lanes in the city. The city authority held meetings all night and failed to convince them to return home. Finally by refusing to give them any food quotas, part of them were driven back to their villages. According to eye-witnesses, this is nothing less than a peasants' strike.

When these workers told us these stories, though with tears in their eyes, which often become red, they still asked us at the end of it, that these stories should not be told to too many people, lest many of them might become disillusioned with the mother country. Judging from their sincere attitude, it can be sure that they are not lying.

From the above mentioned facts, apparently, that the CCP is helpless in confronting the food shortage situation: lacking enough food to feed the peasants to let them have enough energy to work. Any government, even those without any consideration for the welfare of their people, will not let things go on like this, if they can do anything for it. This food shortage, I consider, is due to the adventurous movement of the "great leap forward" and the forced communization. The forced communization has greatly reduced the interest of the peasants in production.

It is quite possible that the food production in 1958 was decreased.

Mei

Los Angeles, California  
August 24, 1959

Dear Comrade L.:

Your letter of July 22, with the enclosure from M. at Hongkong, of July 8, I have received by way of New York. I notice that you question the position I have taken in our discussion of the Chinese Communes. Likewise you question the facts I have attempted to adduce from such information as is available, and you think that I depreciate the information and judgment of the Hong Kong comrades. What you say about their source of information may be entirely true, but it was certainly not presented in very convincing fashion in the article received from M. in February. Much less convincing was his reference to slave labor camps.

I agree with you that "Any Marxist analysis should be based on facts." But this principle could hardly apply to M.'s article in which he tells us that "the worker's wage has been reduced and the peasants can no longer get even enough to eat... families have been abolished...reorganized according to their age and sex. They now live along a strict military line. Cooking equipment has been confiscated...Babies and children have been taken away from their mothers and have been put in houses called 'nurseries' ...the people's anger and resentment has reached a high point. Riots and chaos have occurred in various places...."

Where are the facts to substantiate these very rash assertions? No evidence is submitted. And what objective observers have to tell points in the opposite direction.

Take for example the extensive report of James S. Duncan describing his recent visit to China, which appeared in a series of articles in The Telegram, Toronto, Ontario. (These have been reprinted in booklet form under the title, "China's Great Leap Forward.") Duncan is an industrialist, Big Business man and a Tory. Not a friend of revolution anywhere, he observed the development in China and its Communes from the critical viewpoint of the bourgeoisie. But he presents an objective report of what he saw:

"From my observations many of the stories about segregation of the sexes, cruelty and the forceful separation of children from their parents are vastly exaggerated, if not a complete distortion of the truth." Speaking about the children, Duncan says: "The nurseries and kindergartens were well run, well supervised and the children were apparently adequately looked after, happy and healthy."

An another point in his report Duncan tells of "the policies pursued by the People's Republic and apparently not only willingly but enthusiastically accepted by the great majority of its citizens...The bloodless transmutation of 520,000,000 freeholders into regimented working forces took place in three stages over the unbelievable short span of six years between 1953 and 1958 without uprisings or major oppositions."

In my opinion the observations made by Duncan come far closer to the real situation than the rather distorted picture painted by Comrade M.'s article. And to tell you the truth, the case for greater reliance on the information and judgment of the Hong Kong comrades is not improved by his letter of July 8.

The bad food situation in Peking, to which he refers, does contain an element of reality. But it is important to bear in mind that this city's population has been swelled by a tremendous influx of workers engaged in all the new activities; it has grown from 1,300,000 to 4,600,000 during the last ten years. In Peking, as in several major cities, the food situation was aggravated for one thing, by last year's great diversion to home-made blast furnaces and the strain on rather inadequate supply facilities caused by the transport of steel. In addition to these, and other factors that could be mentioned, there is the extensive export of foodstuff to the Soviet Union in payment for material aid to industrialization.

Referring to a village in Kwangtung Province, M. cites reports in this same letter, of a start to organize people to move out from the locality to escape famine,..."the famine this year is just as bad as it was during the Japanese occupation," it is said. And M. adds reports of thousands of peasants escaping into Canton and driven back to their villages by refusal to allot them food quotas. Though his letter was written on July 8, Comrade M. does not mention the flood disaster that ravaged the Kwangtung Province in June, causing great hardship.

Again I must ask, how can these stories be accepted at face value, when they run entirely contrary to other information coming from the Hong Kong comrades themselves? For example, in the pamphlet published by the Hong Kong group in March, called "Eyewitness Reports of the Communal Rural Areas," the following statement was featured:

"After Communization the starvation which existed to a great extent under Chiang's regime, and in certain areas in the first few years after liberation, has disappeared."

However, instead of arguing about the value of information and judgment of the Hong Kong comrades, let us turn our attention to the essential point in this discussion.

One must assume the existence of great hardships, inequalities, gaps and disproportions of developments in China. To a certain degree these are inevitable under conditions of rapid collectivization and industrialization of a backward agrarian society. Hardships, such as overworking people, caused by abuse or mismanagement have no doubt occurred, otherwise the Central Committee meeting of the CCP last December would not have felt obliged to caution against them. But the weight of all available information clearly indicates that such are not typical of the overall picture of developments. And this overall picture of progress made, which, moreover, corresponds to China's most pressing needs, is for us the most important aspect.

This is the basic framework from which our analysis must begin. And only within that framework can hardships and disproportions be properly understood. Likewise polemical criticism can have justification and real meaning only when proceeding from this basic framework.

How then should we evaluate the overall picture? Here, I think two fundamental questions demand primary consideration. Firstly, have the developments of the Chinese revolution brought improvement in the material conditions of the people: Secondly, is the basic direction proceeding toward the socialist reorganization of society? To me it seems evident that both questions must be answered in the affirmative.

Is it not a fact that since the earlier land reforms in China through the various stages of transformation in the countryside, i.e., from the mutual aid organizations through the cooperatives and the collectives to the Communes, agricultural production has increased at each successive stage, including higher yields per acre? Due to the more effective application of cooperative labor on a constantly enlarged scale the vast projects of irrigation and various other forms of soil and crop improvement became possible. These are facts now commonly acknowledged by all objective observers. The results of improved living conditions for the rural population are equally recognized.

Side by side with progress in the countryside a great industrial structure is rising, spreading a network of mines, mills and plants throughout the country, and recording a corresponding spurt in industrial production. By the end of 1958 practically one hundred percent of all industry was nationalized while in trade and commerce less than three percent remained in private hands. In other words, developments in China followed the lead given by the Communist Manifesto, viz., to use the proletarian political supremacy "to wrest by degrees all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state...and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible." In China the pace has been rapid indeed; it has been one of great leaps and, setting bold targets which apparently have been attained. This, I hope you will agree, is the correct interpretation, and it leaves no room for unfounded charges of adventurism.

Workers are provided insurance for health, welfare, maternity, old age, etc., and free education includes technical schooling. A great effort is made to provide housing for workers in the urban centers and I believe Duncan is approximately correct in saying: "There is a remarkable degree of equality in China among all categories of workers in living standards and earning power."

Disputes about the official Peking figures of production increases in industry and agriculture will neither prove helpful nor clarifying. Economic planning requires honest control figures. Statistical faking would produce chaos and defeat utterly the economic plans. And the fact remains, even if allowing for discounts because of exaggerations, China's positive economic gains since 1949 cannot be disputed. These are far more impressive than anything capitalism can show, and they bear eloquent testimony to the great power and ingenuity called into being by the revolution. All in all, these important factors can be interpreted by Marxists only as affirmative proof of material progress for the people.

Even Duncan does not hesitate to say that such is the case. He sums up his impressions from his own point of view and in his own fashion. "One important factor stands out among all others which contribute strength and support to the Communist Government. Conditions, distressing as they may be, are measurably better than 10 years ago when the Communists assumed power. Whether we like it or not, the incontrovertible evidence is that the Government of Mao Tse-tung has brought to the people of China, peace, unity a sense of national accomplishment, hope for the future and sufficient food so that the spectre of starvation no longer haunts them."

Let us see whether the basic direction of these developments in the continuing revolution are leading toward the socialist reconstruction of society. What stands out on the China scene -- as a result, first of collectivization of agriculture, and second, the establishment of Communes, -- is the disappearance of the small peasant plots. The peasantry is no longer a private property

owning class. Collective ownership of the land is held by the Communes, and the peasants are transformed into wage workers. Petty bourgeois ideology based on private property is not likely to fetter the younger generation. Instead there will be a strengthening of socialist elements. The archaic agricultural relations of the past based on landlord ownership, have ceased to exist. They are replaced by new relations of collective ownership and collective production efforts, which represent a most necessary and fundamental part of the socialist transformation of society.

In combination with industrialization, progressing side by side with these developments, the motive force for cultural advance is taking on form and substance. And out of that arises the only conceivable basis for socialism. As this historical process unfolds, it strengthens the basis of the proletariat as the ruling class.

This overall picture of developments in China must, therefore, be said to be one of material progress for its people marching steadily toward the socialist reconstruction of society. For a Marxist analysis, this is the determining factor standing out above all other considerations. At each successive stage the revolution has advanced uninterruptedly; it has now reached a qualitatively higher level than the mere fulfillment of bourgeois-democratic tasks laid down at its inception by the Communist Party regime. In spite of these earlier limitations and deformations imposed upon it by this regime, the permanent revolution prevailed.

We are revolutionary internationalists, and we are conscious partisans of the Chinese revolution. This imposes upon us the duty of applying the Marxist method of analysis. Doing otherwise invokes the peril of becoming mere outsiders, condemned to the frustrating position of carping critics with a factional axe to grind. Worse yet, it leads to the fatally false conclusions that equate Communes with slave labor camps. Because of this danger I urge you and the Hong Kong comrades to give the most serious consideration to the points that I have tried to emphasize in this letter.

Comradely yours,

Arne Swabeck



November 2, 1959

Dear Comrade Swabeck:

Because of my illness, I have delayed answering your letter of August 27, 1959.

First of all I want to apologize for my poor English. The reason I translated Mei Lei-tar's letter of July 8, 1959 was not to "substantiate" (I misused this word) the viewpoint of Mei Lei-tar but rather to give you some information about China.

Secondly, I should like to advise you to adjust your way of thinking a little bit, not to rely too much on some bourgeois reports, nor to deprecate too much the judgment and information supplied by Hong Kong comrades. If you think "a day of personal observation in Peking yields more than a year of second-hand guessing in the listening post of Hong Kong," I would say "a day of second-hand guessing in Hong Kong yields more than a hundred years of third-hand guessing in Los Angeles." Some comrades in Hong Kong get real information from China and some of them have even been in China for quite a long time; while the only thing a comrade in the U.S. can do is to read reports from bourgeois newspapers and "guess."

Take your evaluation of Mei Lei-tar's article and his letter as examples. You think that the observation made by the Canadian industrialist, Duncan, is far closer than the "distorted" picture painted by Mei Lei-tar's article in February and that the case for greater reliance on the information and judgment of the Hong Kong comrades is not improved by Mei's letter of July 8.

The first thing I ask you to notice is that Mei Lei-tar's article was written last December when the communes campaign was at the height of chaos, confusion and fever. The situation in the communes was so bad that Mao had to resign in order to quiet down some criticisms from the ranks. I would say Mei Lei-tar's equating the commune system as it existed before last December to the ancient Roman slave system was justified so far as the situation then was concerned. But this evaluation certainly could not apply to the commune system which Duncan saw last May, because there has been a substantial change since last December.

According to recent reports from the Hong Kong comrades as well as from bourgeois newspapers, everything has reverted back to the condition of the old collectives. Only the name "commune" remains. For example, the supply system has been cancelled. The private plot of land has been restored. The free market has been partially restored. The community dining halls have been disbanded in some places, etc. The present commune system is just a larger collective farm; not the first shoots of communism as the CCP claimed a year ago. Marxism is a living science. If you use Duncan's description of the communes to refute Mei Lei-tar's evaluation, I would say that you have used the wrong tense of verb!

Your criticism of Mei's letter of July 8 seems to me also unfair. The letter was written before the flood disaster in China. The essence of the letter was to express some doubts about the truthfulness of the increase of

production and to explain that the main reason for the food shortage lay in the forced communization which had greatly reduced the interest of the peasants in production. He said in his letter "If there were to be another 'blossom and contend' campaign, we would get the true figures to prove our present estimation." But history did not compel him to wait too long. On August 26, 1959, the CCP itself openly admitted that its 1958 production figures had been overstated and the goals for 1959 were reduced.

But you were not convinced by his explanation of the reason for food shortage. You had some other reasons. You thought the bad food situation in Peking was due to the ever growing city population. But the city population has gradually grown for the past ten years. Why then was there not a food shortage in the past?

Nor is the extensive export of foodstuffs the main reason for the shortage. Premier Chou En-lai stated on August 26, 1959, at the Plenary meeting of the Standing Committee of the Second National People's Congress: "Some people suspect that the strain on supply of certain commodities was due to excessive exports. This conforms still less to the facts."

The inadequate transportation was also not the reason for the food shortage all over the country last Spring. As Mei wrote me in his recent letter, "The CCP did not think this [the inadequacy of transportation] was the reason for food shortage last spring when thousands of peasants rushed into Canton last May in order to get something to stop their hunger, the CCP cadres explained over and over again, in their street corner meetings (trying to persuade the peasants to go back to the countryside), that the main reason for food shortage was that the peasants ate too much food when the communes were first set-up. They said they had better go back to their countryside and wait for two months until the summer harvest."

As for the Duncan report, I do not question the value and genuineness of it. But what I doubt is that what he has seen in New China is an overall picture. Considering the short period he has stayed, the language barrier he has been confronted with, and the peculiar hospitality of the Chinese (I know this because we always treat guests with the best things we have). I would say that what he saw was probably the best and selected part of the country, but not the real and overall picture of New China. Had Mr. Duncan gone deep into the countryside without any language barrier, he could have seen the real China, the real condition of the Chinese peasants. If you still think that the observations made by Duncan come far closer to the real situation than pictures presented by the comrades in Hong Kong, I would say it is unforgivable partiality and a serious blow to Marxism, the living science.

I think the point upon which we differ is not whether the basic direction of New China should proceed toward the socialist reorganization of society; the question is how to build it. To me, coercive communization is certainly not the principle for building socialism in China. On the contrary, it not only reduces the peasant's interest in production, but also damages the alliance between the peasantry and the working class.

In conclusion let me cite a paragraph from Lenin's Selected Works which may help clarify your way of thinking about the problem of the Chinese People's Communes:

"In relation to the landlords and the capitalists our aim is complete expropriation. But we should not tolerate any violence towards the middle peasantry. Even in regard to the rich peasants we are not as decisive as we are in regard to the bourgeoisie. We do not demand the absolute expropriation of the rich peasants and the kulaks. This distinction is made in our program. We say that the resistance and the counter-revolutionary activities of the rich peasants must be suppressed. That is not complete expropriation." (Lenin's Selected Works, Vol. 2, p. 458.)

Comradely yours,

L.

P.S. I have asked Comrade Peng to answer the theoretical points you raised in your letter.

Los Angeles, California  
December 10, 1959

Dear Comrade L.:

I am sorry to have delayed my reply to your letter of November 2 for so long. The reason is that I have been preoccupied in an attempt, jointly with Comrade John Liang, to make a thorough analysis of our position on the Chinese revolution. This is now about completed; it will be entitled, "The Third Chinese Revolution, Its Communes and the Regime," and will appear in an early issue of the Discussion Bulletin. I hope that you will make sure to get a copy and study the contents for it presents my views far more comprehensively than is possible in a letter.

Meanwhile, I do not consider it fruitful to continue discussion about which information on China is most reliable. The fact is that sufficient information is available to enable a fair estimate of the overall developments. A much more important question is: How do we interpret the information?

On this point, the most disturbing aspect is the tendency displayed by you and some of our Chinese comrades in Hong Kong to accentuate the difficulties that still prevail in China. These difficulties are seized upon and presented gleefully -- so to speak, in an effort to substantiate certain views, certain preconceived notions that have little semblance with the realities of the situation. Unfortunately, we have too much of these tendencies here in our party also. But this cannot be regarded as a very healthy attitude toward a great revolution.

Our Chinese comrades, who know their country's past history, should be especially aware that serious difficulties would arise when a poor and predominantly agrarian society issues out of the revolution and enters the stage of transition toward socialism. There will in this early stage still be material wants, shortcomings of various kinds, yes, even mistakes in calculation and planning. Such, however, are due primarily to the cultural and economic backwardness inherited from the past. Marx had special reference to difficulties of this transition stage when he penned the "Critique of the Gotha Program." Here is the way he put it:

"What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges."

This applies to the difficulties of the food situation, that you again mention in your recent letter, as it applies to all other aspects of life in China today. Your denial that recent rapid growth of city populations, inadequate supply system and export of foodstuffs did contribute to food shortages does not sound convincing. You quote Chou En-lai on exports. What he said was that there had been no excessive exports. But above all, it should be remembered that China does not yet have the means of mechanizing agriculture and producing food aplenty because she is still stamped economically with the birthmarks of the old society.

Instead of viewing these difficulties with sympathy as genuine revolutionary partisans would do, you permit yourself to fall into the trap of the

carping critics who have a factional axe to grind. You insist that the forced communization, as you call it, "greatly reduced the interests of the peasants in production." Such an idea can arise only out of a preconceived notion that the country is Stalinist dominated and everything must, therefore, go wrong. How would you substantiate this charge? The notion of forced communization may still linger in your mind, but there is no such evidence in China. On the contrary, all the evidence shows that the Communes have the support of the overwhelming majority of the people.

Moreover, the reorganization of the countryside followed by and large Lenin's advice which you quote in your letter. The landlords were expropriated. There was no violence toward the middle peasants or rich peasants. They were not expropriated. They were given their own choice of joining, first the cooperatives, and later the Communes; which they did when they saw the more effective work and better returns of cooperative labor.

But you tell me now that "everything has retreated back to the conditions of the old collectives. Only the name commune remains." In support of this contention you cite certain modifications made, such as allotting private plots of land to peasants for gardening, disbanding community dining halls in some places, etc.

Yes, both the regime and the Communes show realistic flexibility, ready for modification where such are needed. That, however, does not change the basic essence of the communes. The large scale cooperative labor and its more rational division of labor remain in effect. Above all, the social transformation of peasants from owners and cultivators of midget plots into wage workers collectively tilling the land that is owned by all Commune members in common -- this basic essence still remains in effect. And it is precisely this transformation of agricultural relations that forms the most necessary precondition for China's advance to her manifest socialist destiny.

So, with this let us try to find the answer to the question you raise, of how to proceed toward the socialist reorganization of society. In China it is demonstrated concretely: Nationalized economy and planned production plus industrialization side by side with transformation of agricultural relations from individual cultivators and owners of midget plots to cooperative labor and collective ownership of the land in the Communes.

We know, so far, of no better way to proceed. Every step forward on this road spells advance for the revolution, for the country and for humanity. It strengthens the community of interest between workers and peasants and preserves the alliance between them. These positive measures we must support; and we must support them unconditionally.

The negative attitude of seizing with relish upon and magnifying every difficulty and every shortcoming serves no progressive purpose; it is not worthy of revolutionists. We know well enough that these shortcomings exist, and spokesmen for the bourgeoisie will in any case try to make the most of them. A sharp reorientation of views and attitudes on this question is necessary. We should conceive of ourselves as genuine partisans of the greatest revolution of our time. By extolling its positive achievements we have a great opportunity to win workers elsewhere and inspire them with enthusiasm for revolutionary socialism.

You mention in your letter that Marxism is a living science. Yes, and I want to add, by applying Marxism in this manner we help to preserve its validity as a living science.

Comradely yours,

Arne Swabeck

THE THIRD CHINESE REVOLUTION,

THE COMMUNES AND THE REGIME

by Arne Swabeck and John Liang

The Political Committee rejected the article, Ten Years of the Chinese Revolution, which we wrote for the International Socialist Review. One of the reasons given for the rejection stated:

"If the general line implied by these assertions (assertions made in the article) should be confirmed as an expression of changing reality, the party would have to recognize both what is new and what has been overthrown in our present basic position. The consequent political and theoretical conclusions would have to be drawn to the full."

Two important and related questions are raised here. The first appears in the reference to changing reality; the second, the political and theoretical conclusions to follow. Together they concern the essence of the method we employ in adopting basic positions. It is our duty to subject ever-changing reality to constant and thorough examination as a means of arriving at correct political and theoretical conclusions. We test our theory against the facts of life, and thereby give our theory a chance to develop.

What is the "basic position" to which the Political Committee draws attention? Presumably it dates back to the resolution on "The Third Chinese Revolution and its Aftermath," presented to our 1955 Plenum. Four years have passed since then. During the interim the actual developments in China have called into question a number of major postulates contained in this document. For example, the resolution asserts categorically:

"...in agriculture the ever increasing demand the regime is compelled to make upon the peasants while it is unable to supply them with manufactured goods is bound to bring it into a head-on collision with the peasantry."

Let us leave aside the somewhat reckless character of this statement. Even the most perfect regime would be compelled, for some time, to make demands upon the peasants even though unable to supply them with manufactured goods. Meanwhile, it would have to take all the measures necessary to safeguard the revolution. Yet the theme of an inevitable collision is repeated several times in the resolution and the regime is characterized as Stalinist. The theme forms a part of "our basic position" on China. At another point it is set forth even more specifically:

"The bureaucracy quickly comes into collision with the peasantry...Such a collision is shaping up in China today. It is a collision with a 400 million mass of individual cultivators of midget peasant plots."

Do these assertions correspond to the actual course of events -- the changing reality? If they do not it is mandatory for us to inquire what is new and what has been overthrown in our "our present basic position." Changing reality provides its own compulsion for constant and thorough examination at every stage and it demands that corresponding political and theoretical conclusions be drawn to the full. For Marxists, this is axiomatic.

The fact is that the prophesied collision did not occur, while present developments point in the exact opposite direction. The reason for this is the changing reality itself: the social and economic position of the once existing 400 million individual cultivators of midget peasant plots has been decisively altered.

### A Question of Life and Death Necessity

Had they remained individual cultivators of midget plots, the peasants would have been condemned to a life of semi starvation. Besides, the old differentiation between poor and rich peasants would reappear and seep through every pore of the agricultural economy. On that basis there would have been no way to undertake great public works, such as irrigation, reforestation, etc., to improve the fertility of the soil, as well as to combat and to overcome the perennial scourges of drought and flood. Agriculture would have continued on its backward, dwarfish and limited scale. There would have been no way to attain the agricultural surpluses so essential to the accumulation of capital for industrialization. In short, there could have been no assurance of the future development of the revolution and its first conquests would have been seriously endangered.

The need to unify the midget peasant plots into a socialist type of socio-economic structure, first, through cooperatives, next by collectivization and finally by the communes, based on large scale cooperative labor, was a life and death question for the peasantry, for agriculture and for society. If China was to industrialize, agriculture had to be subjected to planning, so that certain areas could be utilized for industrial crops, like cotton, while others concentrated on grain, and so on. This could only be done if the farm units were sufficiently large. When the first Five Year Plan began, the reorganization of agriculture had to follow suit. Peasants' living standards gradually improved and agricultural surpluses became available for capital accumulation.

This helped to satisfy the demand the regime was compelled to make upon the peasants. But the regime was still not able to supply the peasants with manufactured goods; mechanization of agriculture was out of the question until a sufficient industrial basis had been attained. Meanwhile, the Commune form of organization enabled local artisans to establish small industrial enterprises based on local resources and local technique. These provided better tools for local needs, and they served thus on an elementary level to bridge the time gap until manufactured goods and modern implements could be furnished by the industry rising rapidly in the urban centers.

### False Analysis of Militant Articles

How are we to appraise these developments in the Chinese countryside? Are we critical commentators with a factional axe to grind or partisans of the revolution? Reading the articles on the Communes that have appeared in The Militant one gains the distinct impression that the former is the case. The most eloquent testimony to the vast creative powers of a great revolution is almost entirely overlooked in the Militant articles. The revolutionary significance of the Communes finds clear expression in the hostile attacks of the imperialist bourgeoisie, but it escapes entirely the attention of the Militant writers. New China's immense advance, when not minimized, is acknowledged only grudgingly. The great leap forward which has astonished an incredulous world, is simply denied. By specious reasoning, developments in China are made to appear as something other than they really are.



In a perfunctory fashion the Communes are asserted to be progressive, but in a sense quite unrelated to their actual nature. The real essence of this progressive nature does not appear in the articles. One aspect of what the Communes made possible -- namely, the large scale mobilization of cooperative labor -- is presented merely as a restoration of China's traditional farming methods. In this manner the article of September 7, 1959, summarizes the great strides made in Ankuo county, Hopei Province: "In short Ankuo was adopting China's traditional farming methods as described in King's book." And further in the same vein: "The Chinese government has been compelled ever since it took power to restore Chinese traditional farming methods."

Though the Communes signify, above all, new relations between men, they are presented in the Militant mainly as relations between things. Where the relations between men are touched upon, an unpardonable comparison occurs between the old and the new China.

The Communist Party, we are told in the article of September 14, is not the first regime to conduct mobilizations for public works -- dikes, canals, reservoirs, etc. This dates back to the periodic levies of 40 centuries ago. However, there is this essential difference: all mobilizations of the past were by means of conscription imposed on the peasantry by a central dynasty or by provincial satraps and benefitting primarily the large landholders. The present mobilizations are those of voluntary, cooperative labor, benefitting the peasants and advancing the country further along the road of socialist reconstruction.

In The Militant article of November 16, the author treats what he calls "The struggle between the individualistic and collective tendencies within the Communes (which) have clearly not been resolved and continue to plague the Chinese CP." What is supposed to be the basis for the individualistic tendencies? Apparently it is the individual patches of ground allotted to the members of the Communes where they may raise some extra beans, a few fowl, or even pigs. The New Statesman is called upon as authority for this contention: "The Chinese themselves still admit that the peasants tend to neglect communal work and produce as much as they can on the small private holdings that had to be allowed them."

Possibly this is one problem among many others that are bound to arise in the transition of a backward country from capitalism to socialism. But when the author of the Militant article applies Trotsky's criticism of the private holdings of Stalin's collectives in mechanical fashion to entirely different conditions in China, a theoretical absurdity results.

The individual vegetable patches allotted to members of the Communes are equated with the private plots held by Soviet collective farmers -- a residue of petty bourgeois private enterprise of the NEP period. For Soviet collective farmers these private plots still account for about one third of their total income. An amazing 56% of the Soviet dairy cows are still, to this day, individually owned and 40% of the nation's meat supply comes from these private plots, reports E.K. Waltermayer from Kharkov in a recent issue of The Wall Street Journal. After having satisfied the state with delivered quotas, these farmers sell the products from their private plots at profitable prices in the "free" market where the gentry buy choice goods not within the range of what workers can afford. This more than anything else contributes to maintaining the petty proprietorship ideology in the Soviet countryside.

For China the essential difference is, first of all, that this kind of relationship between peasants, "free" market and gentry does not exist. Secondly the small family garden plots represent one of the modifications made in the Commune system. They are designed to ease the life of the Commune members. Not sufficiently large for profitable individual enterprise, the members can use the output of their plots merely to supplement a still meagre diet, the same as they are free to do home cooking, if they so prefer, rather than eat in the communal dining rooms.

### Transforming the Chinese Countryside

However, the real essence of the Communes and their progressive nature goes far beyond anything that appears in The Militant articles. Estimates of the Chinese peasantry contained in our 1955 resolution are now completely outdated. The Communes have transformed the Chinese countryside; they have destroyed the confining integument of past agricultural relations. For Marxists, this is of supreme importance. Millions of former peasants are no longer individual owners of tiny plots. All land is owned collectively by the Communes, also implements and livestock.

An Australian Professor of Far Eastern History, C.P. Fitzgerald, who lived for several years in China and made a return visit in 1956, relates developments in his book, Floodtide in China. Referring to the socialist type of cooperatives and collectives, the stage reached in 1956, he says: "All land is pooled; all boundaries are removed, all visible record of separate ownership of individual holdings disappears. The owners, now members, retain title to an equal share of the Co-operatives' joint property, but not a share proportionate to the smaller or greater holding which they pooled in the new organization."

Thus the third Chinese revolution has effected a most decisive shake-up of property relations in the village as in the city. The landlord class has ceased to exist. The basic features of peasant life, the very elements that make a peasant what he is, are disappearing as a result of the disappearance of subsistence or fragmentary farm plots. The individual peasant cultivator, and the individual peasant owner, are no more. The peasant has entered the cooperative labor force of the Communes as a wage worker. What does this signify if not the disappearance of the peasantry as a property owning class?

To this assertion, which we made in the article, Ten Years of the Chinese Revolution, the Political Committee objected, calling it "a sweeping statement." Yet it corresponds to reality. It happens to be a true description of a sweeping change in agricultural relations. Changing reality is most sharply illuminated by the Communes. The social transformation they are bringing about in the countryside is the real measure of their progressive nature.

For a once backward agrarian society like China, these radical developments in the countryside are decisive. Without them China could not advance to its socialist destiny, for the collectivization of peasant holdings in a still predominantly agricultural country must be understood as an essential and fundamental part of the socialist transformation of society. Unfolding side by side with the rapidly advancing industrialization, these developments tend to diminish considerably the age-old difference between town and country. They mark a beginning of the liquidation of the "idiocy of rural life."

The Communes plan and carry out their own many-sided activities in agriculture and local public works as well as in local handicrafts, industry, sanitation, welfare, education, etc. Their efforts in these fields are integrated

with national state planning. The former peasants thereby enter more directly into the system of planned economy alongside the workers in socialized industry. The identity of interest between both is strengthened. Both share the need and the desire to advance the common weal. As a result, the "alliance of workers and peasants" will be reaffirmed on a higher level.

Under these conditions the very nature of the former peasants is bound to change. Their petty bourgeois psychology and private property urges are not immutable. Such characteristics must in time disappear when altered social conditions bring material gains and propel society forward. The older generation, with its set habits and thinking, may be skeptical, but the youth is not bound by the chains of tradition. Of course, it is still too early to ascribe socialist consciousness to the former peasants. But it is an established fact that they have become active and willing participants in the course toward socialization of the land with its collective living and labor. This alters their relationship to the whole social and economic structure. It alters, similarly, their relation to the regime which is actively promoting and supporting these profoundly revolutionary developments. For Marxists, this should be considered as an elementary lesson of history.

What does all this convey to us if not a powerful demonstration of changing reality? The facts demand recognition. And on this score it should not be difficult to ascertain "both what is new and what has been overthrown in our present basic position."

#### How to Enlist Voluntary Peasant Cooperation

One important reason for the success in transforming Chinese agricultural relations lies in the methods pursued by the Peking regime. They stand in the sharpest contrast to Stalin's collectivization, forced through by police terror in the teeth of ferocious peasant resistance. Stalin's measures brought the Soviet Union to the edge of disaster. Obviously, the Chinese CP leaders learned a lesson from this experience, for their methods have been those of persuasion designed to enlist voluntary peasant cooperation.

On December 15, 1953, the CCP Central Committee adopted a directive for the development of agricultural producers' cooperatives. It declared, "they (the cooperatives) represent a transitional form through which the peasants can be induced to advance naturally and willingly to socialism." It stressed as "a basic principle" that the development "should be voluntary on the part of the peasants...Compulsion and commandism and expropriating the peasants' means of production are criminal acts...blind, rash adventurism is totally wrong."

At this point we may be reminded that Stalin drafted "the most democratic constitution in the world" at the very height of his murderous campaign to destroy a whole generation of revolutionists. But the essential difference is that the directives of the Peking regime to use means of persuasion were actually carried out. This is attested by numerous observers, both friendly and unfriendly.

Peter Townsend presents in his book, China Phoenix (published in Britain) a comprehensive description of China, old and new. He knows both, having lived there from 1941 through 1954. His description of agricultural organization from the first mutual aid teams to the cooperatives, emphasizes the

freedom of voluntary choice. Skeptical peasants were left alone until they saw the more effective work with better returns and then came along. "Over and above the economic gain," says Townsend, "there was human advance." Professor Fitzgerald, the Australian historian, is well aware that outside observers suspect intimidation and forcible measures against the peasants; but his reply is: "In China no such evidence is visible." Gerald Clark, the Canadian reporter who visited China in 1958-1959, says in his book, Impatient Giant; Red China Today: "There is no evidence at all that the establishment (of the co-operatives) met with passive resistance, still less with open defiance." Similar testimony comes from other objective observers.

A Swiss journalist, Peter Schmid, who does not conceal his hostility to the Peking regime, went to a Commune in what he called virgin territory by the Pearl River in South China. He tells the story in his book, The New Face of China: "Properly organized labor teams were harvesting sugar cane or digging irrigation trenches across newly laid-out sugar cane plantations...I was struck by the fact that wherever I saw people working there was a distinctly cheerful and relaxed atmosphere."

Heavy pressure from above to achieve the rural transformation was to be expected; but actual coercion is unnecessary where people willingly cooperate. In fact, the merger of about 700,000 cooperatives or collectives into 26,000 Communes within a few months would have been inconceivable without a strong impulse coming from the peasants themselves. Their own pressing needs -- their need to eat, to live and to prevent natural disasters -- as well as the need to increase farm output, appears to have been the real driving force. The peasants were quite eager to implement the measures promoted by the regime. Thus, both the impulse from below and the manifest direction from above converged in mutual interaction.

#### Are the Communes Self-governing?

The greatest assurance to the peasants was the right to manage their own affairs. The grass roots control established at the outset when the peasants dealt harshly with the landlords, was continued. It is maintained in the Communes. These are self-governing politico-economic units. Commune management and political administration are integrated under the direction of an elected administrative committee. And, for the benefit of those who question the facts of local self-government and genuine elections, let us call on the testimony of actual observers.

Peter Townsend describes village elections shortly after liberation. "Anyone over eighteen, who was not a traitor, a landlord, or mentally deficient, could vote." Because of the great illiteracy, and the need to have a secret ballot, he says, voting was often done by dropping beans in bowls placed behind the backs of candidates seated in full view of the voters.

In another instance, Townsend, who speaks Chinese and did not need to rely on interpreters, asked a peasant about his cooperative organization, its function and its meetings:

"Can you say what you like at the meetings?"

"But why not?" He was genuinely surprised at the question. "I can even say the manager is no good if I want to. We elected him in. We'll elect him out if need be."

Professor Fitzgerald, who travelled over large parts of China in 1956, tells about the Higher Stage Cooperative and the manner of their administration: "The members elect the working Committee which directs the management of the farm; they can dismiss this committee, which is composed of members of the farm itself, without any outside government appointed personnel. It is claimed that the right and power of control is real and effective; each cooperative is, in fact, an autonomous unit, managing its own affairs. It is also apparent that the managing committee always consists of 'poor peasants' of ten party members or wholehearted supporters of the regime."

How this works out in practice was related in The New Statesman by R.H.S. Crossman, the British Labor MP who visited three Communes in 1958:

"In each Commune I was informed that the committee had been elected by a show of hands at simultaneous mass meetings...In contrast with what I had seen in Russia, moreover, there was no question of the peasants' being controlled by university experts or party bosses. No leader with whom I talked had been a communist before 1949; indeed all had been illiterate peasants. Now they struck me as self-confident men of action."

#### Are the Workers' Interests Protected?

As regards conditions of the working class, the contrast between new China and Stalin's Russia, or even present day Russia, is no less glaring. Naturally, the creation of a technically qualified industrial labor force is a difficult problem for a backward agrarian society. Stalin's solution to this problem displayed the most cynical disregard for the most precious component of all capital -- human labor power. Draconian labor laws were superimposed on monstrous inequalities; and the latter aspect still remains in the Soviet Union.

How has this problem been approached in China? Let us note first a comprehensive account of a leading Chinese Trotskyist, published in Fourth International, March-April and July-August, 1953. It reports conditions of labor up to the end of 1951. Running through the account are criticisms of the regime but acknowledging its efforts to assure the leading role of the proletariat, protect its interests and win its support by methods of persuasion. Dun Tse-hwei, a CCP leader, is quoted on the permissibility of using authoritarian methods to get this support:

"No, absolutely no. We must wait for the attainment of consciousness by the working class...if the opinion of the mass is opposed to that of the leadership, what can be done? Can it be overcome by the use of authority? No, absolutely no. The comrades in the unions must respect the opinion of the majority. And the comrades were urged to explain patiently in order to gain the confidence of the workers.

Concerning the trade unions, sponsored by the regime, our Trotskyist reporter says: "We can state that in the spring and summer of 1950 the unions were a capitalist instrument in the hands of the government. Today they represent the organization of the working class. We must now admit that, if not from the standpoint of its immediate interest, at least from that of its long-term interest, the unions are the protective organizations of the proletariat."

By his further portrayal, our Trotskyist reporter made it amply clear that the extreme inequalities of Soviet conditions had not been reproduced on Chinese

soil. More recent observers bring the same verdict. Most generally these can be summed up in the manner of James S. Duncan, the Canadian industrialist who stated on his return from a China visit last year: "There is a remarkable degree of equality among all categories of workers in living standards and earning powers."

### Do Workers Participate in Control of Production?

Not so well publicized is the question of the workers relations to management and control of production. An early account appears in the Fourth International, December, 1949, also written by a leading Chinese Trotskyist. His interpretation of Communist Party policies in regions then taken over is somewhat faulty, but he refers to unions, control committees, and a Congress of Workers Delegates set up for Manchurian plants. The North East Daily News, he says, chided party members for their wrong behavior toward these bodies and he quotes from the paper: "It will not be possible to long maintain the positive attitude of the workers if we do not protect them by methods of democratic management. Besides the manager, the engineers and the supervisory personnel, the Control committees must include a majority of workers. These workers should be elected by the unions or by the Congress of Workers Delegates."

The Common Program adopted at the time of the formation of the new government in Peking provided among other important points: "The system of workers' participation in the administration of production shall, for the present period be established in state-owned enterprises." Apparently this had been carried into effect. Peter Townsend describes how Factory Administrative Committees operate in these enterprises. Half of their members, he says, are elected worker representatives, and these committees decide on production plans prepared by government industrial bureaus. Close liason is maintained between these committees and the Staff and Workers' Representative Councils, also elected bodies (replaced in small concerns by mass meetings). Similar references to workers' factory committees occurs in Solomon Adler's book, The Chinese Economy. And finally, at the CCP Eighth Congress, Chou En-Lai stated:

"To encourage the mass of workers and staff to take an active part in managing enterprises and in exercising supervision over administrative work, we are promoting a system of workers' councils in the enterprises."

This goes considerably beyond what we see in the Soviet Union. But -- and this is a legitimate question -- is there, in the case of China, a yawning gulf between democratic aim and directive, on the one hand, and actual performance on the other? Is there, in fact, an unbridled dictatorship, not of the proletariat, but of an uncontrolled bureaucracy? The evidence, some of which we have produced, is that democratic control at the local level, and in industry, is considerable and encouraged by Peking. Full democratic control is an attribute of a socialist society and has still to be attained.

### How About Popularly Elected Government?

Originally the national government came into being in 1949 as a united front coalition, and it was so named. Townsend writes that out of the 662 delegates forming the People's Political Consultative Conference a small minority were selected directly by the political parties, the CP, the Democratic League and the Kuomintang Revolutionary Committee. The majority represented "people's organizations" -- trade unions, student organizations, women's organizations, cultural and scientific groups, field armies, national minorities, etc

in addition to some specially invited prominent people, including former Kuomintang generals. The Communists were, of course, the predominant force.

This body was later superseded by the National People's Congress. Says Townsend: "...by 1953 the votes cast by electors in villages, city lanes and other 'cells' had replaced the hitherto supreme organ of the United Front... With a government elected in accordance with 'democratic centralism' whereby the lower electoral bodies elected representatives to those a step higher, which in turn elected representatives to those immediately above."

Describing the first such regular election in Peking, Townsend points out that representatives were elected directly from large factories, from universities and from city wards; smaller units could combine to elect joint representatives. "All were subject to recall at the elector's demand." This is remarkably similar to the elections to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Evidently the rule of the Chinese Communist Party is so unchallenged and unopposed that it can afford to maintain the democratic electoral forms. It can also afford to have elements of a coalition still in the government. Of its present 13 to 14 million membership, the trained cadre extends into and integrates with all aspects of social, political and economic life, all mass organizations and most likely, all the administrative organs in city and village.

#### On the Nature of the Regime

However, any attempt to define the nature of the Peking regime brings up the question originally posed: Does "our present basic position" correspond to reality? Can the regime be defined by simple allusions to its training in the school of Stalinism, or by reference to Stalinist characteristics alien to socialism? Such references are not very helpful for serious study. We are obliged to test our previously formulated characterization of the regime against the reality of its development, rather than try to fit the facts of history to preconceived notions. We should analyze carefully both the similarities and the contrasts of Chinese development with those of the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union.

We have always attributed the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and its crystallization into a privileged caste, to the conditions of a particular historical juncture. Basically, its rise was due to the world situation and a special correlation of internal factors and forces. Mention need be made here only of such outstanding factors as the economic backwardness of the country and its isolation in a hostile capitalist world. Working class sacrifices, weariness from the civil war and the economic distress that followed the revolution left the road open to leadership for careerists. The necessary retreat from war communism to the New Economic Policy emboldened the petty bourgeois social strata. They became points of support for the rising party and state bureaucracy.

International developments pushed with mighty force in the same direction. A series of working class defeats, beginning with the retreat in Germany in 1923 rose to the greatest disaster in the terrible massacre of the second Chinese revolution in 1927. To this can be added the lapse into fascist barbarism in Italy and Germany. However, as Trotsky pointed out, there was in these events not only a chronological, but also a causal connection which worked in two

directions: "The leaders of the bureaucracy promoted the defeats; the defeats promoted the rise of the bureaucracy." Still for the Stalinist bureaucracy to triumph in the Soviet Union it had to strangle the Leninist party and destroy physically the whole generation that led the revolution to victory under Lenin and Trotsky.

In this manner we interpreted the Stalinist degeneration on historical materialist grounds. For us the rise of Stalinism signified a parasitic growth which is not endowed with any quality of permanence. Such a monstrosity is not likely to be reproduced elsewhere under different historical conditions. If we maintain that this has happened in China nevertheless, we violate our own well established materialist conception of history.

This is precisely what is wrong with "our present basic position." The 1955 resolution predicts that the "insoluble contradiction which characterizes the USSR, and which renders the regime that of permanent crisis, is now being reproduced on Chinese soil." In actuality, what is being produced on Chinese soil renders our position contradictory. But this contradiction is not insoluble; it can, and it must be eliminated.

#### What is Different in the Case of China?

The third Chinese revolution unfolds in a distinctly different historical period and under different historical conditions. To be sure, the new China started out from a position even more economically backward than did the young Soviet state. But it did not suffer from the same isolation. A serious breach has been made in the imperialist encirclement; and the Chinese revolution, in its development, has been able to draw assistance from the now well advanced resources of the Soviet Union, both military and economic.

While a class struggle stalemate prevailed in the metropolitan capitalist centers, the period in which the third Chinese revolution unfolded was not marked by serious international working class defeats. Quite the contrary, The new China quickly became a powerhouse extending the revolution to North Korea and North Viet Nam. It set in train colonial revolts in Asia, that swept through the Middle East into Africa.

Internally, the correlation of class forces since the overthrow of the Kuomintang and the expulsion of the imperialists, has in all decisive respects become increasingly favorable for further revolutionary advance. Instead of compulsion to make retreats, the power unleashed by the revolutionary overturn propelled the new regime forward. Therefore, in this case as well, we should endeavor to seek out, not only the chronological, but also the causal connections between events and the nature of the regime.

Viewing these connections historically we observe the continuity between the ill-fated second Chinese revolution of 1925-27 and its triumph in 1949. The interim was filled in by an unremitting civil war.

A predominantly peasant army, operating primarily in the countryside, under Communist Party leadership, fought the Kuomintang armies as it resisted the Japanese invasion. In this civil war, and the anti-imperialist struggle, the leadership and the cadres were selected, tested, hardened, and their forces organized. Though often the CCP policy was one of veering, shifting back and forth, and conciliating the Kuomintang, in the final analysis Chiang



Kai-shek and the peasants decided the issue of which road to pursue. Chiang rejected class conciliation and the peasants took matters into their own hands and advanced on the landlords.

There was more active worker participation in the revolutionary struggle than is commonly believed. Not only did the most resolute elements surge into the countryside to fight with the army of liberation, but the Townsend report, previously mentioned, describes the links with the underground organization in the cities. Usually these depended on a core of workers; in some cases they reached numerically large proportions. And when the CCP was forced to take up the struggle for power its victory was facilitated by the exceptional weakness of the Kuomintang regime and the impossibility of effective imperialist intervention.

The revolution of 1925-27 was defeated primarily due to the Menshevik policy of Stalin which subordinated the CCP to the Kuomintang. The resurgence in 1947-49 triumphed when the CCP engaged in a struggle for power by revolutionary means, disregarding Stalin's policy of coalition with Chiang Kai-shek. By this action the Chinese Communist Party departed from Stalinism in the properly accepted sense of this term and proved itself an adequate instrument for the historic task.

#### Empiricism of Chinese CP Leaders

To be sure, this revolutionary overturn did not correspond to patterns we had anticipated since 1917. It did not follow the classical lines of the Russian revolution. There the reciprocal relationship between party and class assumed its ideal form. At each stage of its development the spontaneous mass movement was led by a consciously revolutionary party, founded on internationalism and leading the struggle for power in the name of a distinctly socialist program. Yet even this party, the Bolshevik Party, became a genuinely revolutionary party only in struggle. Until Lenin arrived in Petrograd and published his famous "April Theses," the Bolshevik central committee had pursued an opportunist, class-collaborationist policy that could have spelled defeat for the Russian Revolution. It corrected itself in time by rejecting class conciliation and embarking on the road of revolutionary class struggle.

The Chinese Communist Party leaders clung much longer to their class-conciliationist line. But an exceptionally favorable international conjuncture at the end of World War II, coupled with relentless pressure by the Chinese masses, led to a revolutionary triumph that in fact contradicted the program of the party. Even as the Chinese Communist Party took power, its leaders held to their view that the Chinese revolution would be consummated in two stages, the bourgeois-democratic and the socialist. Hence no initial socialist measures were undertaken. The Common Program adopted by the People's Political Consultative Conference, in September 1949, projected the solution of only the bourgeois-democratic tasks. It provided for the transfer of land to the peasants and economic reconstruction was to be based on policies "benefitting both capital and labor." No attempt was made to resolve contradictions between capitalism and the new order, but only to soften them. "Bureaucratic capital" was confiscated and made state property. This included all former Kuomintang-owned enterprises which made up the major portion of the modern economy.

However, China did not then face the kind of situation that confronted the Soviet Union after the revolutionary victory. What the Soviet problems were Trotsky explained to the delegates at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern.

Speaking on the conditions for socialist construction Trotsky declared:

"Once power has been conquered, the task of reconstruction, above all in the economy, becomes posed as the key and, at the same time the most difficult task." But, he went on: "What is rational in economic life does not always coincide with what is necessary in politics." With this Trotsky referred to some of the requirements of socialist construction and the conditions of civil war. He continued: "It is perfectly obvious that from the economic standpoint the expropriation of the bourgeoisie is justified to the extent that the workers' state is able to organize the exploitation of the enterprises upon new beginnings. The wholesale, overall nationalization which we carried through in 1917-18 was completely out of harmony with the condition I have just described. The organizational potentialities of the workers' state lagged far behind total nationalization. But the whole point is that under the pressure of Civil War we had to carry this nationalization through."

In China, the organizational potentialities of the new order were no less inadequate for total nationalization. Even though the Kuomintang opposition was annihilated and the remaining capitalist forces were exceptionally weak, the Communist Party regime kept economic construction confined within the limits of bourgeois-democratic tasks. That is, it did so up until the imperialist intervention in Korea and the attempted strangulation of the Chinese revolution by the economic blockade instituted in 1951. The CCP leaders were then compelled to make a turn. They could take no other measures than those available to a working class power -- measures of the class struggle.

#### Theory of Permanent Revolution Confirmed

Subsequently the CCP leaders put forward their general line of the transition to socialism. Where private capitalist enterprise had previously been encouraged to develop under government control, it was now to be restricted and gradually transformed in order to attain "the step by step abolition of systems of exploitation and the building of a socialist society." At the end of 1952 the first Five Year Plan was launched. Industrialization now became a prime objective.

In agriculture the march of events proceeded from the early mutual aid groups to producers cooperatives and collectives, culminating in the socialist type of socio-economic organization -- the Communes. Unfolding side by side with industrialization, this powerful combination constitutes the motive force for the whole newer culture, while providing a material foundation for the socialist transformation of society.

Thus, regardless of the misconceptions, empirical improvisation and opportunism of the CCP leaders, the uninterrupted development of the Chinese revolution stands out clearly and conclusively. Each new stage has been firmly anchored in the preceding one, each stage elevated society to qualitatively higher levels in which the socialist direction is unmistakable. What this signifies is a striking confirmation of the theory of permanent or continuous revolution.

The course of development in China shows a revolution in gestation, unfolding, maturing -- not the degeneration of a victorious proletarian power. It is the opposite of what brought the brutal Stalinist regime into being. On the world arena Stalin began his climb toward power by opposition to the German revolution in 1923; Mao's first important international action was to aid

materially and militarily the revolutionary forces in the Korean civil war. And for all the differences with the Bolshevik triumph prior to the Stalin era, the course of the Chinese revolution remains still in the October stage. There is no Thermidor.

The question is: shall we recognize this objective reality or cling stubbornly to what is called "our present basic position?" Do we still insist on the characterization of the Peking regime contained in the 1955 resolution?

The resolution says: "...the same basic cadre under Mao who rode the revolutionary wave to power, are now following in Stalin's footsteps in China." And further, "the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy has entrenched itself as an uncontrolled caste alien to socialism." This was written in 1955. Yet in 1959, in utter disregard of verified facts, it has been reiterated in the Dan Roberts series of articles on the Communes that appeared in the Militant. In fact, these articles went further than the resolution by referring to the Peking regime as the representative of an "economically privileged caste...which...has elevated itself above the working class and peasantry and bosses these classes, (and)...promotes its own separate economic interests." (The Militant, September 21, 1959.)

For these flat assertions no evidence whatever is submitted. If we were to accept them at face value it would be incumbent upon us to inquire what has gone wrong with the process of history. How did it happen that a Stalinist-type party acted and continued to act as a revolutionary party? Is it not high time to stop trying to fit the facts of history into an arbitrary political framework? In practical terms, this requires that we reappraise "our present basic position" as set forth in the 1955 resolution. To maintain now that the Peking regime is practically identical with the Soviet regime of Stalin-Khrushchev, which crystallized in a period of revolutionary retreat, would be to divorce the Chinese revolution from its roots in time and circumstance. It would be contrary to facts and contrary to political logic. The position taken in the 1955 resolution can be maintained only by sacrificing the materialist principle and dialectical method that constitute the heart of Marxism.

Viewing the Peking regime as a carbon copy of the Kremlin regime, which is what the 1955 resolution and the Roberts articles did, violates our time-honored concept of the reciprocal relationship between party and class. Trotsky dealt with this question in his preface to the History of the Russian Revolution. He wrote: "Without a guiding organization the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston-box. But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam." In China, the steam was provided by a mighty mass movement that could not be halted but insisted on going all the way. The masses not only welcomed, but they demanded, and themselves undertook the most decisive shake-up and abolition of bourgeois property in city and village. The Communist Party not only rode but, as its policies show, tried to guide the rising revolutionary wave, with which it was compelled to keep step. This dialectical relationship of party and class was the decisive factor. Aside from the early limitations already noted, the party promoted measures essential for the socialist reorganization of society.

We learned in the elementary school of Marxism that men make their history in given conditioning surroundings and on the basis of existing relations. This holds true for ruling regimes as for social classes. The nature of a regime,

while becoming an objective part of the historical process, is at the same time subject to the laws of historical development.

Just as the Stalin regime was conditioned in its rise by the factors of revolutionary retreat, so the Mao regime has been conditioned in its development by the distinctive factors of revolutionary advance.

Bureaucratic Centralism and Its Opposite

There are certain similarities between the two regimes -- Peking and Moscow. But there are also differences -- and the differences are greater. The differences are decisive for a correct political appraisal of the Peking regime. If one examines declarations of the Chinese Communist Party and speeches by its leaders during the Kiangsi "Soviet" period and the later Yen-an period, one finds clear evidence of training in the Stalin school.\* More recent material of the same kind shows elements of an increasing departure from this school.

We do not question the existence of a highly centralized Communist Party regime. It is visible in all aspects of Chinese life. Nor can we doubt the existence of both a bureaucracy and bureaucratism. Yet there still is a contrast, not a resemblance, between Peking and Moscow. Bureaucratism arises from the need to apportion an insufficient national product. The poorer the society that issues from a revolution, the more dangerous is bureaucratism to socialist development. In the case of China, party members and leaders are constantly admonished to be above reproach, to live with the people and learn from the people; there are rectification campaigns to correct abuses. Last but not least, there are the regular measures obliging party and state officials to do part-time stints of manual labor each year in agriculture, industry or on construction sites. Intellectuals, in contrast to their past traditional aloofness from manual labor and laborers, are similarly required to engage part-time in physical work, to combine labor with learning in order to discourage a recurrence of bourgeois notions. Professional army officers have to serve one month each year as privates. On the whole these are sound principles; where excesses have occurred or where people have been driven too hard by bureaucratic means, or by too great zeal, the regime has shown sufficient flexibility to make corrections and to slacken the pace.

The very real existence of a highly centralized regime, with its negative attributes, conveys only one side of the picture in China. The opposite side, that of stimulating creative mass initiative, is just as important. Self-governing Communes tend to counteract excessive or stifling powers of centralization. Participation in industrial management by elected worker representatives, even though this falls short of real workers control of production, will tend in the same direction. Besides, the existing socialist type of productive relations assures a continued growth of industry and of the Chinese proletariat, numerically and qualitatively. The industrial workers will advance not only in skills and culture but in socialist consciousness, thereby increasing their social weight and tending to act as a restraint on bureaucratic manifestations.

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\* Excerpts have been compiled in a Documentary History of Chinese Communism by Brandt, Schwartz and Fairbank.

## Dedication, Austerity and Mass Support

However, granting the existence of bureaucratic tendencies does not at all justify the characterization of the Peking regime as the rule of a privileged caste in the sense that we have always understood it -- a hardened social formation of a parasitic nature, standing above the people, consuming an inordinate share of the national income and concerned primarily with the protection of its own powers and privileges against the masses. There is no evidence for such an assumption. Nor is there any evidence of an omnipresent police system which would be required to protect such a caste.

Townsend mentions a certain degree of social differentiation, the only example in his whole book of about 400 pages. Cadres who drew their provisions from the government would eat in "bigger kitchens," or "little kitchens." To the former came department heads, ministers and those of similar rank. Their fare contained more meat than was served in the more common "little kitchens." But Townsend adds: "After searching for those riotously living Communists of whom one sometimes hears, I came on none who qualified for the description."

More recent verification is contained in Gerald Clark's book. "Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh and Chou En-lai lead austere, almost monastic existences, dedicated to the building of a nation; and millions follow suit," he reports.

Describing the strong desire to join the Communist Party that he encountered everywhere, especially among the youth, Clark comments, "The desire for membership is not motivated by any special privileges, for Chinese Communists, unlike their comrades in the Soviet Union, are not yet treated to any financial gains. Still in the spirit of a religious revival, those who preach Communism work in an austere, dedicated fashion, their reward the gradual conversion of the masses."

What is the response of the masses? Do they support the regime? This is a decisive question. The answer is the enthusiasm and the unselfish striving by the overwhelming majority of the people to build what they believe to be a new and better world under the present regime.

Observers who were there say that is so. Perhaps their verdict can be summed up in the phrase of Felix Greene, formerly chief of the British Broadcasting Corporation's American bureau: "My own observation convinced me that the regime enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people."

James Muir, chairman and president of the Royal Bank of Canada, was even more specific. He concluded his swing through China with this view of things: "The vast majority of the people of China have a government they want, a government which is improving their lot, a government in which they have confidence; a government which stands no chance whatsoever of being supplanted." Other witnesses could be cited to the same effect.

## What Then Must be Our Approach?

A few fundamental questions remain to be considered, particularly the question of our own methodology. If we agree that reality is ever changing and always manifested concretely, then our thinking must reflect these same characteristics, and be likewise concrete and changeable, for only the application of this method can assure a reasonably correct position.

With this as our point of departure, we should re-examine the 1955 resolution which is presumably still the expression of "our basic position" on China. It contains too many arbitrarily conceived formulas -- inevitable collision of the bureaucracy with individual cultivators of peasant plots, inevitable collision with the working class, crisis regime, uncontrolled caste alien to socialism, etc. Are these to remain rigidly fixed no matter what occurs? Unfortunately this has been the case so far. Adherence to these formulas accounts basically for the failure of the Militant to comprehend and expound the real significance of the Chinese revolution.

Even the most scientifically precise formulas can be only limited and provisional in nature because they have reference to developments that are transient and changing. For a revolutionary party to remain trapped, a victim of formulas of the past, would be disastrous. Particularly would this be the case when the issue is the greatest revolution of our generation.

The fundamental changes that have taken place in China, decisive for the future of the continually advancing revolution, require us to arrive at a clear i.e. Marxist, understanding of their significance. They have not unfolded according to norms that we laid down, but it would be unbecoming of us to turn our backs on them on that account. We must recognize and accept changing reality as it really occurs. It indicates clearly "both what is new and what has been overthrown in our present basic position." The consequent political and theoretical conclusions must be drawn to the full.

It is our opinion that the program and slogan of the political revolution is invalid for China, for the simple reason that the Peking regime is not a Stalinist-type regime hindering the country's advance. Bureaucratism there is -- but this is not a distinctive and exclusive characteristic of Stalinism; it existed in the Soviet Union in the earliest years of the revolution, causing Lenin to declare, at the 10th Congress of the Russian Communist Party on December 30, 1920, during the discussion on the trade union question: "Our state is a workers' state with bureaucratic distortions." The Bolshevik answer to the problem of bureaucratic distortions was a perpetual striving to increase the participation of the masses in all phases of government -- in other words, an enlargement and extension of democratic control. That is what is needed in China. The answer to bureaucratism is not a call for the overthrow of the present Peking regime -- which would be regarded by the masses as counter-revolutionary -- but a program of democratic demands designed to curb and break down bureaucratic arbitrariness through ever greater popular participation in, and control over, all phases of the national life.

#### Revolutionary Policies Must Be Supported

Despite immense progress, great difficulties lie ahead for China. The life of the people is still grim though greatly improved. Imperialist boycott denies China full access to the world market. Severe hardships result from being restricted to internal accumulation for the necessary capital to industrialize. Economic plans executed in a backward agrarian society develop gaps and disproportions. In the absence of mechanization, overall labor productivity remains low. The ancient in tools and methods still exists alongside the more modern. Development of the productive forces therefore proceeds unevenly. Anticipating the difficulties attendant upon the transition from capitalism to socialism, Marx wrote in his Critique of the Gotha Program: "What we have to deal with here is communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, as it emerges from capitalist society; which is

thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges."

The negative factors and influences Marx had in mind cannot, and in the case of China have not, altered the basic course toward the socialist reconstruction of society, which is now firmly laid down. The class foundation of this course is the alliance of workers and peasants under the leadership of the industrial working-class, officially avowed by Peking.

The major policies and actions embodied in this basic course -- nationalized economy, state planning and industrialization side by side with the transformation of agricultural relations -- were promoted by the regime and they are identified with the regime. These policies, and the accomplishments recorded, demand unconditional endorsement on our part. Our support of these revolutionary developments must of necessity be critical of all bureaucratic manifestations and emphasize demands for specific democratic measures without which the road to socialism cannot be assured. These should include democracy in the party with free opportunity for all members to criticize and to control policies and leadership. Similarly, democracy in all the organs of government, through the various levels from the local to the national, requires full powers of control in the hands of the people. In the economic domain democratic control by the masses of working people of state planning in production and distribution at all levels is essential to enable timely review of results in the light of actual experience, and to reduce inequalities to the minimum. Implicitly and explicitly our position should include the idea that in China such measures can be attained by means of reform.

We do not deny the possibility that a parasitic caste could arise in China -- if there should be a new and protracted period of reaction in the working class and colonial movement, compounded by treacherous maneuvers with imperialism. But recent indications point to further imperialist decline and decay and a rising revolutionary tide, especially in the remaining colonial countries.

The dialectical relationship between these coming struggles and the further development of the Peking regime will, of course, be reflected in Peking's foreign policy, its internationalism, or lack of it. However, without entering into a discussion here of this complex problem, the following should be noted. The Soviet crushing of the Hungarian revolution was supported by the Peking regime. Yet there is no reason to assume that Peking is oppressed by the same fear of proletarian revolutions and colonial upheavals as the Kremlin bureaucrats, who are obsessed with their line of peaceful co-existence.

The Peking position in Asia, surrounded directly by the undeveloped world of which it is a part, dictates the necessity of extending the revolution to the whole area. The fate of China's transition to socialism is bound up with this no less than it is with the world proletarian revolution.

This is where we come in, for the realization of the world proletarian revolution depends essentially on the understanding, the foresight and actions of its consciously revolutionary elements. But first we must become genuine partisans of the Chinese revolution and give unqualified support to its positive gains. We should do so in conformity with the following correct affirmation of our 1955 resolution:

"The impact of the Third Chinese Revolution, the social transformation it brought about, the blows it delivered to world capitalism have been second only to those of the 1917 revolution in Russia. The 'Russian Question' has been the main axis in world politics for nearly four decades; it now has found its extension and deepening in the 'Chinese Question.'"

December 12, 1959