

SWP

**discussion
bulletin**

Published by the
SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

116 UNIVERSITY PLACE
NEW YORK 3, NEW YORK

Vol. 22, No. 5

March 1961

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Toward a Better Understanding of the Chinese Revolution

By Arne Swabeck and John Liang

With the slogan, "Long Live Leninism!" the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have expounded in very thoroughgoing fashion their position in the ideological dispute with the Kremlin. Their basic declaration (by the Editorial Department of Hong Qi (Red Flag), theoretical organ of the CCP. Republished in booklet form under the title "Long Live Leninism!" by the Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1960) was published on the 90th anniversary of Lenin's birth. Worthily commemorating the occasion, the document breathes the revolutionary spirit of Marxism-Leninism. In political significance, it ranks with the Khrushchev revelations at the 20th Congress of the Communist party of the Soviet Union. It places Peking far to the left of Moscow. In fact, the CCP appears as a genuine continuator of the Bolshevik tradition in opposition to the conservatism of the Kremlin.

We think this document should be studied on its merits, in relation to the history of the CCP and the Peking regime. It would be all too easy -- and in our opinion totally false -- to dismiss it as evidence of minor, episodic disputes between two groups of Stalinists. Nor do we believe that the CCP leaders are engaged in an elaborate deception of international working-class opinion by pretending to be Marxist revolutionists.

The essence of the ideological dispute between Peking and Moscow is China's rejection of the Kremlin policy of peaceful coexistence when based on preservation of the international status quo. With this, the CCP leaders reject the Kremlin's distortions and emasculations of Leninism. The anniversary document deals with cardinal questions: (1) War and the role of imperialism: (2) Is there a "peaceful" road to socialism?

Without specifically naming the Kremlin rulers, the CCP rejects their contention that since Lenin's time there have been important changes that have outmoded Lenin's views on imperialism and war. "On the contrary," says the CCP, these changes "have more clearly confirmed the truths revealed by Lenin." They continue: "We believe in the absolute correctness of Lenin's thinking: War is an inevitable outcome of systems of exploitation and the imperialist system is the source of modern wars. Until the imperialist system and the exploiting classes come to an end, wars of one kind or another will still occur." Therefore, "Marxists-Leninists must thoroughly expose the absurdities of the imperialists and modern revisionists on these questions, eradicate their influence among the masses, awaken those they have temporarily hoodwinked and further arouse the revolutionary will of the masses."

Regarding an alleged "peaceful" road to socialism, the CCP speaks in equally clear and decisive terms. It takes issue with the declaration of the 20th Congress to the effect that the increasing strength of the Soviet sector opens up possibilities of achieving socialism throughout the world by new "forms," including the conversion of parliament "from an organ of bourgeois democracy into an instrument of genuine popular will." This, say the Chinese, is "precisely" the question that divides Marxists from revisionists, and they add: "The capitalist imperialist system surely will not crumble of itself. It will be overthrown by the proletarian revolution within the imperialist country concerned, and the national revolutions in the colonies and semi-colonies."

Hence: "Contrary to the modern revisionists who seek to paralyze the revolutionary will of the people by empty talk about peaceful transition, Marxist-Leninists hold that the question of the possibility of peaceful transition to socialism can be raised only in the light of the specific conditions in each country at a given period. The proletariat must never allow itself to one-sidedly and groundlessly base its thinking, policy and its whole work on the assumption that the bourgeoisie is willing to accept peaceful transformation. It must at the same time prepare for alternatives: one for the peaceful development of the revolution and the other for the non-peaceful development of the revolution. Whether the transition will be carried out through armed uprising or by peaceful means is a question that is fundamentally....determined only by the relative strength of class forces in that country in a given period."

Thus the leaders of the greatest revolution since the Russian October call the Kremlin bureaucrats to account, attack their policies and warn against the illusions these policies create. Theirs is the authentic voice of the Chinese revolution. Are we going to add our voice to theirs? Or shall we stand on the sidelines and hurl bricks? -- because we refuse to budge from our position that the Peking regime is "Stalinist."

Until now, the Peking-Moscow dispute has been regarded in our press as just a passing episode, in which, as against the Kremlin, we support the stated positions of Peking, while regarding the whole matter as simply an "inter-bureaucratic conflict." That is the position taken by Murry Weiss in his Militant articles. He bases our support of Peking's positions on the rather threadbare analogy of the union movement, where we support a group taking a progressive position against one that takes a reactionary position (with a plague on both your houses). He adds this warning: "What is crucial to an understanding of the Peking-Moscow struggle is that contradictory interests of two bureaucracies and not Leninist principles are really involved...The debate...however, is rigged to exclude the masses from participation...The terminology of Marxism-Leninism acts merely as a sort of code language...such a hideous perversion of Marxism-Leninism serves primarily the purpose of refraining from frankly expressing what each side wants for fear of opening the door to the working people to express their interests in unmistakable terms." In other words, we stand on the sidelines and hurl bricks.

According to Murry Weiss, the CCP is a fixed and immutable political phenomenon -- a rara avis of revolution. It was, it is, and it will forever be Stalinist no matter what political positions it takes. Its leaders (says Comrade Weiss, in defiance of the facts) adhere to the "bureaucratic dogma of building socialism in one country." They pursue "far more limited objectives than the repudiation of the Stalinist policy of peaceful coexistence." Worse still, they share responsibility with the Kremlin "for sacrificing workers' revolutions and colonial revolutions in order to come to 'East-West agreements.'" Although the CCP and the CPSU pursue opposite policies, the first revolutionary and the other opportunist-reformist, both are Stalinist. The fact that the CCP conquered power by revolutionary means in disregard of Stalin's directives, and now separates itself from Stalin's heirs on revolutionary grounds -- that makes no difference between them, says Comrade Weiss.

If we were to accept this stilted, mechanical view, we would have to say that the roots of Peking's position, wherever they may be found, are certainly not lodged in the material facts of China's development. Though the essence of Stalinism has no existence in Chinese reality, it is presumed in some metaphysical fashion to have become an unchangeable characteristic of the CCP leaders. Yet

nothing could be more misleading than the lumping together of diverse political tendencies (Peking and Moscow, in this case) in defense of an untenable position. Let us recall it was the Stalinists who used to lump together as fascists, or as "social-fascists," their opponents on the left.

In the International Socialist Review (Fall issue, 1960) Murry Weiss writes of the Chinese and Yugoslav revolutions. Both Communist parties, he says, were compelled to defy the Kremlin and "tear loose from their Stalinist moorings in order to lead socialist revolutions." He adds that this "did more than prove that Stalinism is incompatible with revolutionary leadership." Here we are in entire agreement. Yet the writer insisted: "To be sure, neither Yugoslav nor Chinese Communist parties ceased to be Stalinist. But they did contribute profoundly to the eventual negation of Stalinism."

What kind of political gobbledygook is this? A party "tears loose" from Stalinism and contributes "profoundly" to the negation of Stalinism -- yet, miracle of miracles, it remains Stalinist! Does not the very fact of "tearing loose" from Stalinism imply a repudiation of Stalinism? And does this not oblige us to reexamine our political estimate of a party that acts in this way?

We seem to agree that the CCP led a great social revolution after freeing itself from the inhibiting influence of Kremlin policy. We also seem to agree that revolutionary leadership is incompatible with Stalinism. The question then remains: By what magic can revolutionary action still be identified with Stalinism? When a party leads a social revolution it reaches the crowning height of working-class action. Thus the CCP ceased to be Stalinist in the classical sense of the term. We ought to turn the statement in the International Socialist Review right side up. It should read: Precisely because the CCP ceased to be Stalinist, it has made profound contributions to the eventual liquidation of Stalinism. That is how Marxists who are not political word-jugglers will read the facts.

From the same article in International Socialist Review we learn: "The opposition of Peking to Moscow's Stalinist line will likewise help encourage a revolutionary reorientation of Communist workers and youth. Such a reorientation can only lead them to a fusion with Trotskyism." We agree. The Peking position can certainly play such a progressive role. But again we must pose the question: If the CCP is an instrument for revolutionary reorientation, how can it still be designated "Stalinist" and accused of practicing hideous perversions of Marxism-Leninism? Should we persist in such nonsense, the label "Stalinism" will lose all meaning except as a term of political abuse.

In an effort to clear up the evident confusion, we might recall some of the main aspects of CCP history. The party's first bitter experience with Stalin's policies and methods was during the 1925-27 revolution that ended in catastrophic defeat. The party was then young and inexperienced and had not acquired a consistent Marxist outlook. But there is considerable evidence to show that in the ensuing period the leadership learned from its experiences and became better prepared for its future role. For 22 years, from the time of the 1927 defeat until the great victory of 1949, the party fought in a civil war against the Chiang Kai-shek dictatorship. During that time it also led a 7-year guerrilla war against the Japanese invaders.

While the CCP fought Chiang, Moscow gave him official recognition and support. During the Japanese invasion, the CCP made a "united front" with the Kuomintang for joint action against the invaders. While this led to certain class-

conciliationist measures by the CCP, and while the party fostered illusions of a permanent coalition, the leaders never repeated the Stalinist policy of subordinating their party to the Kuomintang, which was what brought defeat to the revolution in 1927.

Dan Roberts concocts a quite different version from his own fertile imagination; of the CCP he writes: "We knew it was not a revolutionary party. We knew it to be a bureaucratized party from as far back as 1927. Its cadres were declassed petty bourgeois...." (Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 21, No. 3, September 1960.)

This gem of hindsight suggests some questions. Did the party perhaps become contaminated, and bureaucratic, because of the blood-bath administered to it by Chiang Kai-shek in 1927? Did it acquire the privileges that go with bureaucratism while holed up in the caves of Yen-an? Would it not be more sensible to acknowledge that a close relationship between party and masses, developed under conditions of continuous civil war, simply did not permit any bureaucratism? It was, in fact, the fusion of leadership and masses that helped guarantee the later victory of the revolution.

We saw the same phenomenon in the Cuban revolution. Fidel Castro has pointed to the armed Cuban people as proof of a real democracy and its guarantee. In the case of China this is also true. The CCP has always based the realization of its policies on the armed people. But here Dan Roberts objects. Disregarding the well-established facts of history, he writes: "The Communist party leadership deformed the revolution but did not succeed in derailing it. The enormous revolutionary surge of the masses....pushed the CP onto a road it had not previously envisaged and in fact onto a road it had previously barred. But the CP succeeded, nevertheless, in bureaucratizing the mass movement and in keeping the movement from breaking out of bureaucratic confines." The CCP was, he tells us, pushed to power "without shattering its monolithic hold over the mass movement." (Ibid.)

This glib, artificial construction has only one thing wrong with it -- it is false. We are asked to believe that the CCP leaders did not foresee the revolution, in fact barred the road to its realization, but were nevertheless pushed on to that road by the masses. While this was happening, the party leaders held the mass movement in a bureaucratic vise which has not to this day been shattered.

What is one to make of such contradictory nonsense? If we stand the facts of history on their head we can insist that it was the illiterate, backward masses that foresaw the revolution, prepared for it, and thrust an unwilling leadership forward in the struggle for power. Such a fantastic view has nothing in common with the Trotskyist idea of a reciprocal relationship between leadership and class, between party and masses. If we were to accept the Roberts thesis, the party of the revolution is really redundant and unnecessary, except as a kind of symbol. It doesn't need to discuss and decide on policy, for in due time it will be driven and whipped into the pursuit of its historic goal -- which is to lead a revolution and then become a parasitic bureaucratic excrescence upon it.

The Chinese revolution, on the contrary, provides us with a perfect object lesson in the dialectic of history: a hesitant, doubtful revolutionary party, pushed by the masses on to the track of revolution, then taking command and leading the revolution to victory. Let us remember that the Bolshevik party also wavered and inclined toward opportunism, and was set on a revolutionary course only by Lenin's vigorous intervention. Both Russia and China exemplify the vital

reciprocal interaction of party and class. If the Bolshevik party was essential to the triumph of the Russian revolution, was not the CCP also essential to the triumph of the Chinese revolution? We continue to downgrade the CCP because of our stubborn insistence that it is "Stalinist." But what makes a party "Stalinist" even though its policies and acts are revolutionary? It is high time for the Weiss-Roberts school of thought to answer that question.

There is more to be said on this question. A revolution is not simply born. It must first be conceived, then attended at delivery. In China the CCP was the midwife. It can claim the revolution as its own achievement. This gives us a clue to the current Peking-Moscow ideological conflict. Peking's position is rooted firmly in the continuing advance of the Chinese revolution. Through the various stages, the CCP has acted as a revolutionary party. After conquering power, the party promoted the socialist reconstruction of society. It now pursues a class-struggle policy internationally in order to safeguard China's position. Contrariwise, the Moscow line reflects the views and attitudes of a privileged bureaucracy that came to power, not by revolution, but in reaction against a revolution. The conservative Kremlin policy reads: Let's keep what we have and add to it. War and revolution threaten everything. Let's avoid them.

Clinging to false positions produces endless absurdities. That's how it is with the insistent attempts to make the label "Stalinist" stick to the Peking regime and the CCP. The issue of International Socialist Review referred to above contains an article by William F. Warde, in which the writer describes the Soviet Union's amazing capacity for recuperation in the postwar years. He adds: "The socialist revolution itself broke through to new ground, extending into eastern Europe and eastern Asia and scuttling Stalin's theory of 'Socialism in One Country' as a by-product." But Murry Weiss in his article insists that the Peking regime is "saddled with the Stalinist theory of socialism in one country."

Thus we are asked to believe that Peking picked up an outworn, discredited theory tossed away by history and made it the axis of China's policy. There is just one thing wrong with this construction: it does not fit in with Peking's revolutionary internationalist policies. Warde is correct when he says, in effect, that history has relegated Stalin's ill-famed theory to the past. Yet Murry Weiss tried to saddle it on the CCP in the same thoughtless manner in which the label "Stalinist" is applied.

Dan Roberts dealt with Peking's alleged adherence to the theory of socialism in one country in his previously-quoted Plenum report. Citing what he considers evidence of such adherence, he wrote: "It includes a statement by the CP leaders envisaging fifty years of 'socialist construction through heavy sacrifices by the masses.' This is the Stalinist perspective of building 'socialism' in a single country instead of relying on and promoting successful revolutions abroad, especially in the industrially advanced countries."

What are the facts? The CCP leaders set no timetable for "sacrifices" by the masses. What they did was to tell the people that because of China's backwardness the road to socialism would be long and arduous. They told the truth, as honest leaders should do. Is that evidence of "Stalinism?"

It is necessary to pursue the question of the theory of socialism in one country a little further. We always regarded this theory as one of the consequences of Stalin's rise to power in the Soviet Union under the peculiar

circumstances of Russia's post-revolutionary development. In opposition to the Bolshevik policy of revolutionary internationalism, and in opposition, also, to Trotsky's programmatic idea of permanent revolution, Stalin proclaimed the possibility of building a self-sufficient socialist society within the borders of the Soviet Union. This utopian doctrine expressed the conservative interests and mood of the new Soviet aristocracy (the bureaucracy) under conditions of isolation in a hostile capitalist world. But today the first workers state is no longer isolated. On the contrary, it has become the heart and center of a vast and growing socialist bloc. In Yugoslavia, in eastern Europe, in China and Viet Nam the imperialist encirclement was decisively broken. This opened up new vistas for the international socialist revolution. Revolutionary China, from the outset, was not isolated, but could draw, and did, large-scale assistance from the Soviet Union. The two countries have been drawn closer together by a centripetal force arising from their common aims and symmetrical social systems. While this is still far from an integration of the Russian and Chinese economies, consciously planned in the spirit of socialist internationalism, it does definitely rule out any notion of "socialism in one country." The truth of the matter is that history has left Stalin's theory far behind. It could not take root, much less sprout, in the Chinese reality of uninterrupted revolution. While Stalin proclaimed and sanctified the theory, the Chinese leaders never accepted it or gave it credence.

The theory of socialism in one country had counterrevolutionary implications. As Trotsky pointed out, "From this theory there can and must follow....a collaborationist policy toward the foreign bourgeoisie with the object of averting intervention, as this will guarantee the construction of socialism, that is to say, will solve the main historical question. The task of the parties in the Comintern assumes, therefore, an auxiliary character; their mission is to protect the USSR from intervention and not fight for the conquest of power." (The Third International After Lenin, p. 61.) Trotsky's prognosis and warning were verified more than once. In its most pernicious form, Stalin's theory of socialism in one country finds expression in today's Kremlin policy of peaceful coexistence based on the status quo. It is this that has drawn the sharpest rebuke from the Chinese leaders:

"The modern revisionists seek to confuse the peaceful foreign policy of the socialist countries with the domestic policies of the proletariat in the capitalist countries. They thus hold that peaceful coexistence of countries with differing social systems means that capitalism can peacefully grow into socialism, that the proletariat in countries ruled by the bourgeoisie can renounce class struggle and enter into 'peaceful cooperation' with the bourgeoisie and the imperialists and that the proletariat and all the exploited classes should forget about the fact that they are living in a class society, and so on. All these arguments are also diametrically opposed to Marxism-Leninism. The aim of the modern revisionists is to protect imperialist rule, and they attempt to hold the proletariat and all the rest of the working people perpetually in capitalist enslavement." (From "Long Live Leninism!")

The import of Peking's sharply worded criticism was quickly grasped in Moscow, if not by our own comrades whose views we are dealing with here. Are they perhaps complaining that while Peking's words may be fine, they do not correspond with Peking's deeds? That may be what Dan Roberts sought to prove when, in his Plenum report, he asserted that the CCP leaders, instead of relying on and promoting revolutions abroad, pursued a policy of "neutralizing the bourgeoisie -- that is, the perspective of 'peaceful coexistence' deals with imperialism." This allegation may fit the notion that the Peking regime is Stalinist, but evidence to support it is singularly lacking. In fact it is decisively refuted by the support China gave

to the war against imperialism in Korea, similar support to the revolutionary war in Viet Nam, and the support, both moral and material, presently being given to the Algerian uprising against French imperialism.

The party position, laid down in the 1955 resolution, is that the Peking regime is Stalinist and therefore bureaucratic, and that a political revolution will be necessary to transfer power to the people. Dan Roberts, addressing the Plenum, said: "The resolution predicts -- it does not call for, but it predicts -- that a political revolution will be necessary to replace the present regime with one of workers' democracy oriented toward helping to advance the world socialist revolution." Why this double talk about predicting and advocating? If we are honest about predicting a political revolution in China -- a prediction presumably resting on foreseeing its necessity -- then we must also call for it. Otherwise we have no business predicting.

Comrade Roberts attributes to us the view that "all the (1955) resolution did in effect was to take Trotsky's book, *The Revolution Betrayed*, and to substitute Chinese names, dates, and places for the corresponding Russian ones," and that the resolution is a "mechanical application of our appraisal of the Soviet Union in Stalin's time to China today." We shall not quarrel with this interpretation. Dan Roberts rejects it. Yet he employs precisely this mechanical method in his polemic against our analysis. This stands out most clearly in what he writes about the collectivization of peasant holdings. He takes Trotsky's condemnation of Stalin's forced collectivization in Russia and applies it to the farm policies of the Peking regime. It seems to be Roberts' view that since both Chinese and Russian agriculture were backward, the derivative social and political factors become equal. If that were true, all one needs to do is cite Trotsky's criticisms of Stalin's policies in order to appraise Peking's policies -- especially Trotsky's point that the technical prerequisites were lacking for Stalin's collectivization program.

Matters are really not that simple. The disparity between the poorly-developed productive forces and the new property relations inevitably spells trouble for the socialist revolution in an economically backward society. Means are lacking to advance farming techniques and raise production. It takes time to build an industrial complex that can furnish farm machinery, electricity and chemical fertilizers. This time gap spells peril for the revolution. Yet the contradiction between the low level of industry and the requirements of socialist reconstruction was less acute in China than in the Soviet Union. Unlike the Soviet Union, China was not isolated and cut off from access to world economy by total blockade. From the beginning, China received large-scale material aid from the Soviet Union and from the Soviet-bloc countries of eastern Europe. At the same time, Peking, in its economic planning, made use of China's enormous manpower to establish small and medium-size factories that could be put into operation quickly. More important, perhaps, was the relationship between the Peking regime and the rural population. China's peasants were the driving force of the revolutionary struggle for power. They hailed the revolution as their own and supported the subsequent collectivization measures because these served their interests.

In contrast, Stalin's collectivization was a desperate crisis measure, bureaucratically conceived, forced on the countryside in the teeth of ferocious peasant resistance. It produced devastating consequences. "Never before had the breath of destruction hung so directly above the territory of the October revolution as in the years of complete collectivization," Trotsky wrote. China's reorganization of agriculture, on the other hand, was consummated in stages determined by both need and possibility, with the cooperation of the rural population. It was an

organic development based on free choice by the peasants and corresponding at each stage to their actual needs. Where Stalin's collectivization produced crisis and breakdown, China's represented a remarkably smooth transition that brought immediate gains to the economy and great advances in human welfare.

Agricultural reorganization did not, of course, eliminate the time-gap which occurs before industry can provide the means of farm mechanization. There was, however, close collaboration between the government and the Communes. This enabled the Communes to bridge the gap by their own means. Following directives from Peking, they set up workshops and small industrial plants designed to meet local needs, thus enabling the government to concentrate on developing industry according to a national plan. The government supplied technicians and skilled workers to assist the Communes in improving farm techniques; while the Communes sent workers to the cities to acquire industrial skills. Thus the whole undertaking of rural transformation was advanced. The miniaturization of industry in the countryside (e.g., the backyard blast furnaces) not only supplemented the national industrialization; it also served as an effective interim measure to improve agricultural implements and farming techniques.

In the Soviet Union under Stalin anything like this would have been impossible. That it was possible and successful in China was due to the nature of the Commune form of organization. Within the structure of the Commune government control and Commune management are integrated. As self-governing politico-economic entities, the Communes manage their own affairs and elect their own administrative committees. The basis for democratic initiative is thus provided. In Stalin's Russia, the collectives never knew independence, democracy, local initiative or self-government. They have scarcely attained to such a status even today.

We understand very well Comrade Roberts' burning desire to find fault with China's Communes. He is committed to his oft-repeated view that all they signify is a restoration of China's ancient farming system. He feels constrained to defend his ill-founded prediction of inevitable conflict between the Peking regime and the rural population (there are no longer any peasants). For critics with a factional axe to grind such an attitude is natural. It is not becoming to genuine partisans of the Chinese revolution.

That there should have been immense difficulties, hardships, inequalities and mistakes, both in planning and performance, was inevitable. A perfectionist sitting at a desk in New York can find much to criticize. Some experiments, like the backyard blast furnaces, yielded less than was expected of them and they had to be abandoned. There was much empirical improvisation and plans often had to be adjusted to unforeseen difficulties. No blueprints are available for the socialist reorganization of an economically backward society.

Difficulties similar to those in China, and problems even more grave, confronted the Soviet Union in Lenin's time. Because of poverty and backwardness, combined with the ravages of civil war and imperialist intervention, the Soviet Union retreated to the New Economic Policy. What was then the attitude of revolutionists? Did they lie in ambush, preparing to spring forth with criticism and condemnation?

Our press comes dangerously close to the point at which "criticism" of the Peking regime begins to transcend our loyalty to the great Chinese revolution. This is not too difficult to demonstrate. We proclaimed our support of the Chinese revolution in the 1955 resolution. We designated the power that emerged from the revolution as a "deformed workers state." But our support of the

revolution, except for an occasional article demanding China's admission to the United Nations, has consisted of attacks on the Peking regime and its policies. We have played up the manifold difficulties of socialist reconstruction and at times have come pretty close to exulting in China's woes. Our press has been less concerned with portraying the Chinese revolution as a great historical event than with proving that the Peking regime is "Stalinist" and "deformed." We see cleavages between the government and the people where none exist. Although socialist reconstruction can go forward only through government and government policies, we are eternally against the government.

That there are hangovers (even strong ones) of Stalinism in the CCP leadership we would not deny. Let us remember, however, that the Chinese leaders received only part of their training in the school of Stalinism. By far the greater part they received in the school of revolution. Hangovers, in general, are not determining -- an excellent point made by Trotsky when he pointed out that "feudal remnants" could not be predominant in backward countries brought into the capitalist orbit by imperialist powers.

According to Dan Roberts, a major collision between the Peking government and the rural population is taking place because of disillusionment with false promises, heavy state requisitions and adventuristic policies. This collision takes place only on the pages of Roberts' manuscript. There is no more ground for his assertion that the Communes are virtually gone, replaced by the pre-commune cooperatives. Says he: "A bastardized setup -- part collective, part individual economy -- has been restored." What are the facts? The system of Communes not only has not been liquidated in the rural areas, but it has been extended to the cities. Urban Communes have been set up around the large state-owned industries, others around government offices, schools and colleges. Most numerous are those in residential areas. Women, seeking escape from domestic chores and entry into the social labor force, often took the initiative in setting them up. Among their activities are the workshops and small factories set up to produce clothing and household items. Others turn out machine parts and chemical products. These urban Communes have community dining halls, nurseries, kindergartens, health centers, hospitals and cleaning-repair stations. They are in charge of re-housing projects and the construction of new homes to replace old slums. All activities are under the direction of management committees selected by members of the Commune. The results of their work are to be seen in economic and cultural advances.

China, no less than the young Soviet Republic, suffers from the disparity between the inadequately developed productive forces and the socialist property relations. "This contradiction," according to Comrade Roberts, "gives rise to all sorts of bastardized social formations that are in reality the rebirth of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois tendencies for whose growth the soil of China is today more propitious than for the growth of genuinely socialist relations." Comrade Roberts also takes issue with our view that Stalinist degeneration in the Soviet Union resulted from the world situation and a special correlation of internal factors and forces. In his opinion we failed to probe these multi-factors to determine which was primary. Trotsky did so, he informs us, and his conclusion was that Stalin's rise was due principally to internal factors, i.e., the poverty and backwardness of the Soviet masses.

This seems to imply that China's backwardness condemned it in advance to carry the burdensome load of Stalinism. We cannot accept such a miserably fatalistic perspective. No part of it is derived from Trotsky's writing, thinking or method of analysis. At this point let us say that we have no interest in

controversy regarding interpretations of Trotsky's texts, whose general meaning is to us crystal clear. We think every position must stand or fall on its merits. Let us avoid the futile labors of so many "interpreters" of Marx, who wrote at great length about what Marx really meant, only to demonstrate that the application of Marx's method was farthest from their minds. As Trotsky wrote in 1905, in an article entitled "Summaries and Perspectives": "Marxism is above all a method of analysis -- not analysis of texts but analysis of social relations." We urge every comrade to keep these words of wisdom in the foreground of his mind.

Social revolutions change social relations. Where the revolution advances uninterrupted, as in China, the new social relations develop on a more solid foundation and find more conscious political expression. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, parasitic formations appeared in the period of reaction against the October revolution, weakening the original revolutionary basis and distorting its political character. It really is not difficult to recognize the dialectically opposite nature of the rising revolution in China and the Stalinist degeneracy which in the Soviet Union resulted from revolutionary retreat.

Comrade Roberts, however, seems determined to press his charge that China is suffering from Stalinist-type totalitarian rule and bureaucratic oppression. For evidence, he goes at some length into the "Hundred Flowers" episode. The events that arose in this connection are deserving of a more serious study than the tendentious, one-sided reports of Mei Lei-tar, from which Comrade Roberts quotes so extensively. This is the same Mei Lei-tar who more recently wrote from Hongkong that the policy of Communes was "plunging 600 million Chinese into slave conditions which are worse than any that could have existed in ancient Rome." (Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 20, No. 8, May 1959.)

Mei Lei-tar depicted the "Hundred Flowers" events as exclusively a progressive leftist movement directed against bureaucracy and Comrade Roberts concurs in this view. It is true that the "Hundred Flowers" episode resulted from widespread complaints of bureaucratic abuse. Peking, while launching a "rectification" campaign, also sought means of gaining greater cooperation from Western-oriented intellectuals who had been carried over from posts under the Kuomintang regime and were resentful of pressure for "ideological remolding." The government also sought ways of improving relations with the "Democratic" parties that are minor participants, without any real power, in the government.

Mao Tse-tung, in his speech on "Contradictions Among the People" (the "Hundred Flowers" speech), said the main cause of the difficulties was "bureaucracy on the part of those in positions of leadership;" in some cases even on the part of "the higher authorities." Intellectuals and members of the Democratic parties were invited to criticize the shortcomings of the Communist party regime. At first, the response was hesitant, but soon it swelled to a torrent of criticism. Intellectuals, leaders of the minor parties and students joined in. A good deal of the criticism was aimed straight at bureaucratic abuses by CCP officials. But it was not, as Mei Lei-tar reported, a universal left-wing outcry directed against the regime itself. In fact, most of the critics were careful to reassert their loyalty to the revolution and the regime. At the same time, some of the critics did ride full tilt against CCP rule and assailed some of the fundamental tenets of the revolution. Others denounced the coalition as a sham, even though the CCP had never tried to mask its leading role in the coalition. Singled out for vigorous attack was the party's committee system in the universities. (Mei Lei-tar's description of this system as a "secret police

to investigate people's thoughts" is a repetition of capitalist propaganda. The function of the committees was the entirely proper one of guarding education against bourgeois-minded professors).

It was only when Peking became thoroughly alarmed by the virulent attacks of class critics on the revolution itself that countermeasures were taken. Any revolution worth its salt defends itself against assaults by the class enemy.

Many of the critics were branded "rightist" and in some cases demoted. Some higher CCP functionaries, including provincial governors who became involved with a certain type of critic, or who had been caught in bureaucratic acts, were treated more harshly -- removed from their official posts and expelled from the party. Yet except for three executions in Hanyang, where an open revolt occurred, there was no reported police action against critics of the regime, either on the right or left. No one was put in prison. (See Roderick MacFarquhar, "The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals" and Harriet E. Mills et al in the Atlantic Monthly, December 1959.)

In the grim and arduous struggle to advance a backward society authority has to be asserted by the party and government. Pressure to reach desirable goals often leads to abuses. In China such pressure is severe and we may be sure that bureaucratic abuses are not lacking. Frustrations and even rebellion against required disciplines, with their subordination of the individual, are unavoidable. Serious revolutionary leaders do all they can to allay discontent by correcting faults and striving to eliminate abuses. But for hostile class elements such a situation is a ready-made opening for counterrevolutionary schemes.

We see this happening in Cuba. Some of Castro's erstwhile bourgeois-minded supporters turned against the revolution when its character as a radical social transformation -- not just a palace revolution -- became plain. In the Kronstadt revolt against the Bolshevik government a similar element was present. It would be a mistake to equate the far more serious Russian incident with the manifestations of opposition in China. But we must acknowledge that this opposition grew out of a similar situation: the difficulties and hardships of revolutionary transition.

There are ample facts to refute allegations that China is subjected to totalitarian rule and Stalinist oppression. First, the critics were able to voice their complaints freely. All criticisms of the CCP and the government were faithfully reported in the party press. While ferment among intellectuals and students was widespread, neither urban nor rural workers participated in it. On the contrary. Workers helped subdue the revolt at Hanyang. As for the "Democratic" parties -- of which there are six, largely bourgeois or petty-bourgeois in orientation -- they continue to function legally. Some publish their own papers.

What happened to those branded as "rightists" is shown by the fact that about 26,000 of them had this label removed on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the revolution in October 1959. Three months later, in a Tokyo dispatch by AP dated January 3, 1960, based on a monitored report from Peking, we learned that "25,000 more Chinese branded as rightists in 1957 are now back in the good graces of the Peiping regime."

The campaign of "rectification" that followed the "Hundred Flowers" campaign was not aimed only at the "rightists." Heavily accented was the struggle against

bureaucratism. This led to linking the cadres more firmly to the masses and the integration of mental and manual labor. Party and state officials were sent part-time to the countryside or into factories to share in the work of the people. Intellectuals were required to do physical work as a means of discouraging bourgeois notions. Students combined labor with learning. Commanders of the armed forces were obliged to serve one month of the year as privates. Tillman Durdin, in a dispatch to the New York Times August 4, 1960, reported that the cadres had been directed to reduce the hours spent at their desks and devote at least half their working time to manual labor with the people. Separate mess halls were forbidden; the cadres were required to take their meals in the community dining rooms.

Thus, considered without prejudice, the events of the "Hundred Flowers" period furnish no evidence of totalitarian rule or Stalinist oppression. Any attempt to convert them into an indictment of the Peking regime has no more validity than earlier efforts to charge the Kronstadt revolt to misrule by the Bolsheviks.

Can the same thing be said for Peking's attitude toward the Chinese Trotskyists? Comrade Roberts says "No!" and he adduces an appeal of the Chinese Trotskyist organization in connection with arrests of its members in December 1952 and January 1953 by the Peking regime. Although according to information from Hongkong the prisoners were long ago released, Comrade Roberts tries to use the arrests as proof that the Peking regime is Stalinist, since a revolutionary government would not arrest revolutionists. Comrade Roberts asks: "Why couldn't the CP leaders form a coalition with the Chinese Trotskyists?" The answer is startlingly simple. Even had the CCP shown a desire for such a coalition, the road was barred by the attitude of the leading Trotskyists. These leaders were so out of touch with reality that they did not even recognize the revolution, much less support it. They took the view that the movement led to a revolutionary victory by Mao Tse-tung was just another of China's many peasant wars and that its political outcome required impeachment and condemnation.

The Chinese Trotskyist leaders elaborated their views in several articles that appeared in 1952 in our International Information Bulletin. They said: "The victory of the Chinese CP is not equivalent to the victory of the workers and peasants...The new regime does not represent the interests of workers and peasants, but those of the bourgeoisie...the regime is still in the service of the bourgeoisie, and hence it still remains a bourgeois regime...The rule of the Chinese CP is a sheer Bonapartist dictatorship."

It is embarrassing to read these absurdities by the top leaders of Chinese Trotskyism. Overlooking the revolution that had actually occurred, they looked forward to its later occurrence and called for the "overthrow of the Bonapartist rule of the Chinese CP."

Thus it was the false position of the Trotskyists themselves that made it impossible for the CP leaders, at the head of a victorious revolution, to consider coalition with them. The Chinese Trotskyists failed utterly to comprehend, in their majority, the gigantic events unfolding before their eyes. There was, however, a minority of clearer vision, whose spokesman was Maki. This is what he wrote: "We have only sketchily applied one or two abstract principles to the concrete events. As the movement does not conform to our idealized norms, we shrug at it with contempt. Despite the fact that the sky and earth have been turned upside down, we disdainfully remark 'no way out' and turn our backs to work in a small circle, quietly awaiting another revolutionary storm which would

burst forth outside of this existing movement.

"Until the Kuomintang regime was overthrown by the mass movement under the CP leadership, we still did not proceed to a thorough examination and reappraisal of the events in order to push the revolution to the end by adjusting ourselves to the tempo of the march of the masses. On the contrary, all we did was to condemn the movement as being 'halfway,' 'reactionary,' 'paralyzed,' and 'hysterical,' and predicted from day to day the collapse of the new regime. We were delighted by the disappointment of the masses and dejected when the masses cheered.

"This complacent, abstentionist mood, however, cannot resist the pressure of the masses. Blinded by the dazzling light of events, some of our comrades have begun to waver, others are more than ever tending to shrink into a solitary corner in order to maintain their own inner equilibrium and avoid contact with the outside world. We have paid a heavy price for this fault of sectarianism. When we examine the Chinese events and review our tactics, we must first of all clear away this harmful heritage of dogmatism and sectarianism." (International Information Bulletin, March 1952.)

Maki's dismal report was confirmed from another source. At the 11th Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Fourth International in May 1952, Comrade Peng called attention to manifestations of errors in the Chinese section and added: "Since then I have received a report from our Chinese organization stating that some comrades are claiming that the movement led by Mao is the third Chinese revolution, that there is consequently no need for a revolutionary organization, and they are leaving our organization in order to enter the CP." (International Information Bulletin, December 1952.)

In other words, Peng, as late as 1952, still refused to believe that the third Chinese revolution had taken place! The total disorientation of the emigre group of Chinese Trotskyists led logically to the viewpoint that the policy of the Communes was "plunging 600 million Chinese into slave labor conditions which are worse than any that could have existed in ancient Rome." It must be said: The Chinese Trotskyists are in a blind alley, having separated themselves in theory and practice from the living stream of events.

Unfortunately, our party's position suffers from similar disorientation. Theoretically, in the abstract, we recognize the Chinese revolution and agree that each revolution finds its own unique forms of expression. But we turn our backs disdainfully on developments in China. The uniqueness of the Chinese revolution presents new experiences that should be explored in order to develop our Marxist understanding. But our opponents in this discussion shy away from such an exploration. They content themselves with the synthetic formula: the Chinese revolution was born deformed by Stalinism. They tailor the facts of the revolution to this preposterous assertion. They slap the label "Stalinist" on developments that should be analyzed, thus foreclosing further examination.

But an unresolved contradiction remains. Our theoretical organ admits that the CCP led a socialist revolution and that such leadership is incompatible with Stalinism. Yet in defiance of political logic the label "Stalinist" is still attached to the CCP.

The contradiction can be resolved if we discard preconceived notions and face up to the facts. In our opinion, the policy of the political revolution in China

must be abandoned. It does not and cannot apply to a government and a regime that clearly are not Stalinist, and that in fact pursue policies, both internally and externally, that are revolutionary. By the same token we must cease regarding China as a "deformed" workers state. If we persist in an attitude so demonstrably at variance with realities, we align ourselves, not with the opponents of Stalinism, but with the enemies of the Chinese revolution. We propose that the party go over to a policy of critical support for the Peking government.

It is imperative that we now differentiate our attitude toward the Peking regime from our well-founded and still valid policy toward the Kremlin rulers. In the Soviet Union it is still the historic task to end bureaucratic rule and restore workers democracy. This is the essence of the political revolution. Meanwhile, we might ponder the question: to what extent will the ideological positions of the CCP leaders and their condemnation of Kremlin opportunism assist in the regeneration of Soviet democracy? Trotsky was confident that the Soviet workers would overthrow the bureaucratic bosses once the danger of capitalist restoration had receded. "For this," he wrote, "it is necessary that in the West or the East another revolutionary dawn arise."

Prophetic words! China's young revolution has arisen to challenge the conservatism of the Kremlin. There can hardly be any doubt that it will prove a mighty factor in the liquidation of Stalinism and the restoration of the revolutionary glories of the first workers' republic.

January 25, 1961