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Contents

	<u>Page</u>
1. On Evaluating the Chinese Revolution, by Arne Swabeck	1
2. Where I Differ with Comrade Swabeck on the China Question -- A Statement by John Liang	16

20¢

ON EVALUATING THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

by Arne Swabeck

The resolution of 1955, entitled "The Third Chinese Revolution and Its Aftermath," contained a statement that has turned out more prophetic than its authors could anticipate. The statement reads: "The 'Russian Question' has been the main axis in world politics for nearly four decades; now it has found its extension and deepening in the 'Chinese Question'." This has proved all too true. In the world Trotskyist movement the disorientation and confusion about the Chinese question runs deep. What has become most outstanding are the examples of how not to analyze and how not to evaluate a great revolution.

The contribution by Milt Alvin (Discussion Bulletin Vol 23, No. 8, September 1962) is a striking illustration. It introduces a method that is quite foreign to our tradition. Needless to say, any resemblance to a Marxist approach is purely coincidental. What Milt Alvin in fact proposes to do is to judge the Chinese revolution and the Communist Party's role in it by what somebody said about the party ten or twenty years ago. He refers extensively to the writings of Li Fu-jen and Harold Isaacs. This approach stands everything on its head and tends to disorient party members; it must be turned right side up so that we may gain correct understanding of the important question before us.

To be more exact, we must proceed from the recognition of the Chinese revolution as a living reality and use it as the guide for an evaluation of the participants. Like the Cuban revolution, as we declared in our resolution adopted at the last party convention, in its main course it "followed objective laws long ago worked out by Trotsky." (the laws of the permanent revolution). This is both a high tribute to the Chinese revolution and a precise scientific definition. Perhaps Comrade Alvin has overlooked this characterization or else he had failed to comprehend its real meaning.

But we can well use this as our starting point for a serious analysis. Social revolutions, such as those in China and Cuba, transform society, change history, and put all theoretical concepts to the test. They are the great crucibles which illuminate the role and the basic qualities of the participants -- individual leaders and parties regardless of what others had previously said about them. Revolutions are also the points of departure from which we proceed to review, to re-examine and, if necessary, to re-evaluate positions held in the past about developments leading up to the victorious transformation. We review and re-examine past positions in order to enrich our own theoretical concepts and thereby help to prepare ourselves for our tasks. For Marxists, this should be ABC. This is what we have learned in the

Trotsky school, but this is not the method of Milt Alvin. On the contrary. Motivated by narrow factional prejudices, he seeks in vain from past positions to distort the present. Yet, the mighty achievements of the Chinese revolution reduce all past conjectures to insignificance.

The 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia became a great lesson to those of us who were then participants in the movement here, first in the Socialist Party and next in the Communist Party during its early period. The names of Lenin and Trotsky were inseparably linked and they worked hand in hand as leaders of the revolution. Previously, over a period of years, they had at times disagreed. In the heat of controversy they had said nasty things about each other. At one point Lenin angrily called Trotsky a "Judas".

However, in the crucible of revolution all these charges were wiped out. The revolution was the great test against which all past positions were measured. When later Stalin dug up some of Lenin's sharpest remarks and hurled them at Trotsky, what was our stand? To re-interpret the revolution in line with these remarks? Not at all; the lessons of the revolution and Trotsky's role in it became our guide to refute Stalin's slanders. The revolution had changed decisively all conditions of the past. With the experiences of the revolution we could view the past controversies between Lenin and Trotsky in an entirely different light, and we could learn from them.

The Cuban revolution is much more fresh in our minds. It has also a prior history, going back beyond the landing of the intrepid little band from the Granma. How do we judge this revolution, its fundamental characteristics and its leadership? Are our estimates based on what we had previously said about Castro, Che Guevara and others? -- some of which were not so well thought out. Of course not. The revolution as it unfolded became our basic criterion for an understanding of its various stages, its leadership and the preceding history. Even our judgment of Blas Roca and other CP elements, together with their positions in the past, must of necessity be guided by their role in the revolution as our main criterion.

This applies with equal force to our study of China. Events there leading up to and including the historic defeat in 1927, and the role of Stalin's policy in it, have been forcefully elucidated and interpreted by Trotsky in his book Problems of the Chinese Revolution. None of the questions that arose during that period are in dispute in our ranks today. Since then Chinese history shows a consistent pattern of the Communist Party engaged in struggle. Twenty two years of either civil war against the reactionary Kuomintang regime or open and direct warfare against the Japanese imperialist invaders. In this period the Communist Party and its armed forces constantly grew in numbers and influence among the mass of the people.

Referring to certain questions of this period Comrade Alvin quotes at great length from writings of Harold Isaacs and Li Fu-jen; these are counterposed as an alleged challenge to excerpts from recent contributions to our discussion by Swabeck and Liang. It is perfectly true that Li Fu-jen made some severe indictments of the Chinese CP during the later thirties and early forties. He wrote these in the white heat of anger over Stalin's terrible bloodbaths in Moscow. We all shared this anger and we extended it without exception to all Communist Parties. But Li Fu-jen was also the first to view the role of the CCP entirely differently, after its revolutionary victory in 1949. Writing in the Fourth International (January-February 1951) he declared: that the "Peking regime is not a carbon copy of the Kremlin." This view he motivated carefully. Li Fu-jen made this analysis of social relations before any of us had become aware of them, and this is unquestionably his most important contribution to our discussion on the Chinese revolution.

This declaration touches the basic essence of the Chinese CP, its character, its views, its actions and its actual relation to the revolution. And please remember: a revolution is a process, not an event; it is not just born, it is conceived and attended at delivery. A revolution has a history and it has a leadership. The living forces that carried the Chinese revolution to victory had to be selected, tested, educated, organized and prepared for the struggle for power. These same living forces -- essentially the party cadre -- had to understand and act in accord with the needs of the revolution through its stages of uninterrupted development. In this historical process the leadership was selected; it was tested, and the theory of the permanent revolution found verification.

This history up to the present day is available to us, at least in its basic outlines. It provides now a reliable means by which to judge the true role of the Chinese Communist Party. It enables us now to decide our position far more correctly and far more completely than could be done by merely watching events in the past as they occurred.

Any serious study will quickly reveal that the Chinese revolution is real. It is a continuation and extension of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution on the colossal scale of Asia; a revolution as real as life itself, and all that is real is rational. It is not the deformed phantom devoid of all reality that some comrades have concocted in their own minds. The Chinese revolution is a genuine socialist revolution.

Comrade Alvin also quotes extensively from the thesis "The War in the Far East and the Revolutionary Perspectives," adopted at the Fourth International Founding Conference, in 1938. The author of that thesis is Li Fu-jen. It contained some exact and very pertinent observations as, for example,

that the defensive campaign against the Japanese imperialist invasion assumes for the Chinese "the character of a war of national liberation." But the sections quoted are merely extensions and explanations of a couple of historical prognoses.

The first prognosis insisted that: "The peasantry, by reason of its intermediate and dependent social position... is unable, despite its numerical preponderance, to play an independent role in Chinese society. It cannot solve even the most pressing problems by regaining possession of the land and relieving itself of the burden of landlord-usurer parasitism. Much less is it capable of reorganizing the entire agricultural economy on a new and higher level by establishing large scale collectivized farming."

The second prognosis stated categorically: "A new turn of events, enabling a new revolutionary party to take shape on the foundations created by the Bolshevik-Leninists of the Fourth International, will be required before the Chinese masses will be able to take the revolutionary road."

Apparently Milt Alvin overlooked these forecasts of the 1938 thesis; or perhaps, since they were too faulty, they did not suit his purposes. Let me hasten to add, however, that at the time we all held the same faulty views about the Chinese peasantry. We simply did not know better, but this is no excuse for ignorance now. Concerning the requirements for a new party in China, though not very realistic at the time, we all tended to accept it and we were all proved wrong.

Before proceeding further let us recall what Trotsky had to say about historical prognosis in answer to Shachtman. When, shortly before the Second World War, the Soviet armies invaded Finland, Trotsky indicated the consequences of certain revolutionary possibilities. But when Shachtman demanded: Where is the civil war in Finland which you promised? he drew from Trotsky the following reply:

"Every historical prognosis is always conditional, and the more concrete the prognosis, the more conditional it is. A prognosis is not a promisory note which can be cashed on a given date. Prognosis outlines only the definite trends of the development. But along with these trends a different order of forces and tendencies operate, which at a certain moment begin to predominate." (In Defense of Marxism, p. 175)

A different order of forces and tendencies operated also in China and rendered the historical prognoses invalid. History presented a different outcome than anticipated by the 1938 thesis. It showed the armed peasant forces to be the great battering ram that annihilated all that Chiang Kai-shek, with heavy American imperialist support, could muster; and it carried the struggle for power to a victorious conclusion. It was done, however, in an alliance with the

working class and under the leadership of the working class. In this alliance, moreover, the Chinese peasantry proved itself capable of abolishing landlord-usurer parasitism and proceeded to reorganize agriculture on a new and higher level of collectivization in the communes.

The Communist Party had long since adopted the necessity of the worker-peasant alliance as a key provision of its own program. Its effectiveness is well attested by the events. The requirements for a new party vanished as the Chinese masses took the revolutionary road under the leadership of the CP which proved itself an adequate instrument for the historic task.

In other words, the course of the revolution, through its various stages of development, invalidated the major propositions of the 1938 thesis. By the same token, the extensions and explanations of these propositions fall by the wayside along with the views we all held of them at the time, when the thesis was adopted. That they have lost all validity should now be frankly admitted. Furthermore, rather than permitting attempts to utilize this thesis in efforts to discredit the Chinese revolution and the leadership we should recognize the need for its revision.

Where Milt Alvin among the many quotations presents views of his own, we search in vain for evidence of a revolutionary approach to a world development, the tremendous importance of which no one can deny. Instead there is the palpably sterile, derogatory view of events interlaced with innuendoes about CCP repressions of opponents. Reading this account, one would not surmise that it has any reference to a revolution. Only deep seated prejudices are clearly evident. One paragraph concedes that after winning power the Communist Party took certain progressive steps; outside of that, according to the author, all the Chinese revolution has done is to produce a Stalinist type bureaucratic regime. Never mind the imperative need to learn from a great revolution and impart its lessons to others; Milt Alvin is too busy hurling brickbats. May I suggest to him as was once proposed for the editor of the Militant, namely to make his "position crystal clear as a champion of revolutionary China, with such certainty that no one will be able to get up and ask, WHERE DO YOU STAND?"

The United Front and the Peoples Front

The efforts of the Chinese Communist Party to establish a united front with the Kuomintang to repel the Japanese imperialist invasion has become a subject of considerable denunciatory comments; charges of capitulation and betrayals have been added. But this united front was not an isolated event. Preparatory to the struggle for power, it became an integral part of the revolution. Therefore, in the light of the revolution these adverse comments and charges also require re-examination. By understanding its various aspects, we gain greater knowledge of the whole process.

The Japanese imperialist invaders had by the time of these efforts managed to subject most of China to their rule; they were in control of all major cities and all the vital arteries. This provoked a defensive campaign, as correctly stated in the 1938 thesis, which assumed "the character of a national war of liberation." As early as 1932 the CCP had urged a united nation to fight the invasion, and at the Sian incident in December 1936 (the kidnapping of Chiang Kai-shek by Chang Hsueh-liang's Manchurian Army) the formal proposal for a united front was made. It contained both conditions and concessions.

Most important conditions were restoration of civil liberties and release of all political prisoners; convene a national assembly with all parties sharing joint responsibility for the government; improve the standard of living of the people (chiefly by reduction of land rents, interest and taxes).

In turn, the CCP offered as concessions to rename the Soviet region under its control and institute a formal democratic system; rename the Red Army and accept direction of the Military Council of the Central (Kuomintang) Government; discontinue the policy of overthrowing the Kuomintang by armed force; discontinue the forcible confiscation of the land of the landlords. The last two points had always formed central features of the CCP program. Hence their discontinuance were principled conditional concessions to achieve the requisite unified popular support for the war to resist the imperialist invaders.

Derisively some comrades have called this another edition of the popular front. In the sense that it aimed to unite opposing class forces for a specific task, that name may be used. In reality it had a lot in common with the united front the Bolsheviks made with Kerensky to defeat the Kornilov counter-revolutionaries. In China the unity of action simply had to draw in both Mao Tse-tung and Chiang Kai-shek, the Communist Party and the Kuomintang, bourgeois and proletarians, landlords and peasants in the struggle for national liberation. Civil war and war against the invaders could not be carried out simultaneously; forcible expropriation of the landed estates had to be held in abeyance for the duration; to whom the land is to belong, the Japanese imperialists or the Chinese people, had to be decided first. In the choice: whether complete colonial subjection or national independence, Marxists should not have the slightest doubts.

The Communist Party did exactly what was to be expected from a revolutionary party. To initiate the united struggle for national liberation it laid down the requisite conditions and made the necessary concessions so that while Chiang's part in the struggle was minor, desultory and spurious, he could neither reject it nor successfully obstruct it. Landlords could not successfully recruit puppet armies for the Japanese.

Certainly faults can be found in more than one aspect of the actions, but the basic policy of the Chinese Communist Party was correct. Moreover, the leaders did not repeat Stalin's policy of subordinating their party to the Kuomintang which brought disaster in 1927; nor did they give up the independence of their army which remained intact under its own commanders.

For Trotsky this question of choice between China's complete colonial subjection or independence was never in doubt. Concerning the Japanese onslaught on China in 1937 he wrote in October of that year against certain alleged followers of his who proposed to remain neutral between the Mikado and Chiang Kai-shek:

"We know Chiang well enough as the hangman of the workers. But this same Chiang is now obliged to lead a war which is our war. In this war our comrades should be the best fighters. Politically, they should criticize Chiang not for making war, but for making it in an ineffective manner, without high taxation of the bourgeois class, without sufficient arming of the workers and peasants, etc.

"...Chiang Kai-shek cannot assure the liberation of China it is clear; but he is trying to stop further enslavement of China, and that is a small step to further liberation. With all our energy we take part in this small step.

"In the last analysis...a people that is capable of defending itself arms in hand, against one robber will be capable tomorrow of repulsing the other. A revolutionary party which understands this and which takes consciously and courageously its place at the head of a people defending the remains of independence -- only such a party is capable of mobilizing the workers during the war and after the war to conquer power from the bourgeoisie." (Quoted from The Newsletter, London, May 6, 1961)

The Chinese Communist Party did just that. It proved itself capable of mobilizing the workers during the war and after the war to conquer power from the national bourgeoisie. Though Chiang's forces received a constant flow of massive American aid, with nothing going to the armies of the CCP, the latter dealt blows to the Japanese invading forces from which they could not recuperate. They liberated and held control of an area comprising about 100 million people. From the 40 to 50 thousand who had survived the constant battles on the 6,000 mile Long March from Kiangsi to Yen-an, the now newly named Eighth Route Army had grown to more than a million men; a people's militia counted 2.2 million men. The Communist Party had a membership of more than a million; it had gained enormous prestige among the people, invaluable experiences and a higher level of consciousness. In fact, the question of who shall be master in the land was decided during this war of national liberation, basically due to the correct policy of the Communist Party.

After the Japanese surrender, the Communist Party, engaged in negotiations with the Kuomintang for the possibility of a coalition government. Some comrades have cried out against this, as if it were tantamount to treason. Any serious motivation has been lacking of course. Even a militant union on strike will negotiate with the class enemy while fighting on the picket line.

In China, the end of seven years of war against imperialist invaders gave rise among the people to widespread demands for peace. From the United States the Marshall Mission came with demands for negotiations toward the establishment of a coalition government. This was its formal approach, the reality showed its support for Chiang Kai-shek. Not less than 60,000 U.S. marines were landed to occupy the vital arteries stretching into Manchuria. Whole Kuomintang armies numbering 450,000 men were ferried by sea, or airlifted, by U.S. forces to strategic points in Manchuria in order to prevent Japanese arms falling into the hands of the Communist armies. Finally, and most decisively, in August 1945, Stalin signed the Sino-Soviet treaty, which pledged Russian support to the Chiang Kai-shek government, as the legitimate government of China. Under such conditions only idiots would have refused to negotiate.

Results of the negotiations were a feeble truce; which Chiang broke after less than six months; civil war then unleashed the final struggle for power. Other negotiations took place subsequently when Chiang attempted to sue for peace. Terms offered by the CCP were described in the "U.S. White Paper" as demands for "unconditional surrender."

However, where in the case of China measures to unite opposing class forces for specific action against invaders proved successful because of their historical necessity, in the Spanish Civil War of the late thirties measures to unite opposing class forces in a popular front turned out a historical disaster. The significance of this difference should be studied carefully; it contains lessons of vital importance for Marxists.

The essential difference is that in China the unity in action of opposing class forces had for its purpose a struggle for national liberation -- an issue of utmost concern to all the people. In Spain this unity in action of opposing class forces was conceived, initiated and organized as an instrument of the class struggle; it was set up to lead the fight for working class objectives on the highest possible level of actual civil war against fascism. The idea of united action with supposedly liberal sections of the bourgeoisie for such objectives proved to be a fatal illusion. It turned out the surest way to defeat in the civil war under the people's front government of Caballero as well as that of Negrin.

None of the measures necessary to strengthen the working class and its peasant allies and weaken the enemy forces could

be put into effect. For example, giving land to the peasants and thus arouse them to enlist in the civil war in alliance with the workers, was vetoed by the "liberal" bourgeois parties in the peoples front, who were linked by many ties to the landowners. Leaders of these parties cried out against workers factory committees; they would not tolerate seizure of the factories for war production, because such measures would undermine the foundations of private property. Freedom and independence for Morocco would have dried up Franco's pressgang recruiting grounds. This also the bourgeois parties in the people's front refused; it might endanger all colonial domination of Africa.

Victory in the Spanish civil war demanded revolutionary methods of struggle. Placing leadership in the hands of the people's front combination made that impossible, and the inevitable defeat followed.

Confusion in the World Movement

In the world Trotskyist movement the lack of clarity on the Chinese question becomes noticeable the more the latter advances; in this can be included also the Cuban revolution. The result is confusion and conflicting currents of thought -- the surest reminder that the lessons of these great historical developments in China and Cuba have not been sufficiently studied nor properly assimilated. But this should also serve as a warning that without serious study and thorough discussion of such questions, in the reunification now taking on concrete form, the confusion may become worse confounded.

Resolutions adopted at the Sixth World Congress deal quite extensively with China, and on a theoretically higher level than is current in the SWP. That the communes exert great attraction on countries emerging from colonialism is acknowledged. At the same time the Kremlin hostility to the communes is correctly interpreted as fear of their potential danger to bureaucratic authority. Other parts describe correctly the CCP leaders' challenge to the Kremlin opportunist concept of peaceful co-existence, their warnings against illusions thus created and their insistence that war is inherent in imperialism. Similarly the Peking rejection of the Khrushchev notion that bourgeois parliaments can serve as instruments of revolutionary transformation, its emphasis on uninterrupted revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat -- all these important points are duly noted, only to be followed by a rather strange conclusion, to wit: "although the opposition between the Chinese CP and the Soviet CP is not that between a revolutionary party and a conservative one (in the workers state) this opposition has considerable consequences for the revolutionary struggle in the world." A strange conclusion indeed, a sort of political double talk.

More recently the International Secretariat adopted a resolution on "The Repercussions of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU." It contains some pertinent analysis, but one point is entirely unwarranted both theoretically and practically. As published in the Fourth International English edition, No. 14, p. 20, the resolution declares:

"In relation to the Mao Tse-tung tendency, we give it, as in the past, critical support where it defends a sharper attitude in relation to imperialism and the colonial bourgeoisie...above all where it abandons the whole Stalinist conception of the 'revolution by stages' in the colonial countries and advances empirically in its own way, towards the theory of the permanent revolution."

Whatever the Stalinist conception of revolution by stages is supposed to mean is not defined. But the Marxist conception of the revolution by stages in backward countries -- the bourgeois democratic stage and the socialist stage -- is quite familiar to all of us. Evidently it is familiar to others, for it so happens that the present CCP leadership has adhered consistently to this concept. To make sure that this is clearly understood, I will quote a series of statements to this effect, made by Mao Tse-tung during the period from the 1927 defeat to the 1949 victory. Thus in November 1928, explaining the "Struggle in the Ching Kang Mountains," Mao wrote:

"At present China certainly remains in the stage of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. A program for a thorough democratic revolution in China, includes, externally, the overthrow of imperialism so as to achieve complete national liberation, and internally, the clean up of the influence of the compradore class in the cities, the completion of the agrarian revolution, the elimination of feudal relations in the villages, and the overthrow of the government of the war lords. We must go through such a democratic revolution before we can lay a foundation for passing on to socialism."

In the same year, discussing the question, "Why Can China's Red Political Power Exist," Mao Tse-tung said:

"China is in urgent need of a bourgeois-democratic revolution, and this revolution can be completed only under the leadership of the proletariat."

Reporting to a national party conference in 1937, Mao touched on this subject as follows:

"Communists will never abandon their ideal of socialism and communism, and will reach the state of socialism and communism by going through that of bourgeois-democratic revolution...We advocate the theory of the continuous development of the revolution, of the continuous development of democratic revolution into a socialist revolution." The necessity of proletarian leadership was reiterated.

In 1940, Mao Tse-tung wrote his article, "On New Democracy" in which he predicted an interval of capitalist development and further declared:

"The first step or stage of this revolution is certainly not, and cannot be, the establishment of a capitalist society under the dictatorship of the Chinese bourgeoisie, but will be the establishment of a new democratic society under the joint dictatorship of all Chinese revolutionary classes headed by the Chinese proletariat. Then the revolution will develop into the second stage to establish a socialist society in China. It is correct and fits in with the Marxist theory of development of the revolution to say that of the two revolutionary stages the first provides the condition for the second and that the two must be consecutive without an intervening stage of bourgeois dictatorship...For the present, new democracy and for the future, socialism; these are two parts of one organic whole under the guidance of communist ideology."

Again in 1945, speaking "On Coalition Government," Mao had this to say:

"It is only through democracy that socialism can be attained -- this is the fundamental truth of Marxism...It would be sheer illusion to try to build socialism on the ruins of the colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal order... without pushing to the end the democratic revolution which is democratic in character, a democratic revolution of a new type led by the Communist Party...The carrying out of this program does not yet advance China to socialism. This is not a question of being subjectively desirous of making this advance; it is due to the fact that the objective political and social contradictions of China do not permit such an advance."

Finally, in December 1948, when Mao Tse-tung urged, "Carry the Revolution Through to the End," he stated the CCP position more fully:

"If the revolution is to be carried through to the end, we must use the revolutionary method to wipe out all the forces of reaction, resolutely, thoroughly, wholly and completely...set up a republic that is a people's democratic dictatorship under the leadership of the proletariat and with the worker peasant alliance as its main body...create the prerequisites of transforming China from an agricultural country and make it possible for her to develop from a society with exploitation of man by man into a socialist society."

I have quoted statements by Mao Tse-tung so extensively in order to convey a rounded impression of how deeply rooted was the conception of revolution by stages. But I think

we should also listen to what Trotsky had to say on this question. I am citing a few excerpts from the article, "Class Relations in the Chinese Revolution" published in The New Internationalist March and April, 1938. It was written in 1927, but never before published. Trotsky stated:

"To believe that without the victory of the proletariat in the most advanced countries, and prior to this victory, China is capable with her own forces of 'skipping over the capitalist stage of development' is to trample under foot the ABC of Marxism.

"In the course of the transitional period, the Chinese revolution will have a genuinely democratic, worker and peasant character. In its economic life, commodity-capitalist relations will inevitably predominate. The political regime will be primarily directed to secure the masses as great a share as possible of the fruits of the development of the productive forces and, at the same time, in the political and cultural utilization of the resources of the state. The further development of this perspective -- the possibility of the democratic revolution growing over into the socialist revolution -- depends completely on the course of the world revolution, and on the economic and political successes of the Soviet Union, as an integral part of this world revolution.

"That is why it is of utmost importance today not to permit any muddling in the determination of the stage through which the Chinese revolution is passing. It is a question not of the socialist but of a bourgeois-democratic revolution. And within the latter, it is a question of the struggle between two methods: bourgeois conciliationist as against worker-peasant. It is possible today only to speculate as to the manner and conditions in which the national democratic revolution can rise to the socialist revolution, whether it will occur with or without an interruption and whether this interruption will be long or brief. The further march of events will bring the necessary clarification. But to smear over the question of the bourgeois character of the present revolution with general considerations of a non-capitalist development is to befuddle the Communist party and to disarm the proletariat."

Please note how close the conception of Mao Tse-tung approximates that of Trotsky. Let us see next how this problem worked out in real life.

When assuming state power the CCP leaders maintained their view that the Chinese revolution would be consummated in two stages -- the bourgeois-democratic and the socialist. The first task of the new regime was to carry through the historically belated bourgeois-democratic revolution: overthrow of the Kuomintang, expulsion of the imperialists, national unification and land reform. These steps were brought to completion under the leadership of the working class.

The compradore capitalists, who had been interlocked with the foreign imperialists and native landlords and had monopolized economic life, were vanquished with the Chiang Kai-Shek regime. Their properties (the major portion of the modern economy) were immediately confiscated and made state property. Private enterprise remaining in the hands of the national bourgeoisie (medium and small capitalists) was encouraged to develop under government control. Unlike the young Russian Soviet Republic, where civil war necessitated total nationalization in order to secure militarily the power of the working class, China could afford to take more time. China's civil war had already been won. Capitalist ownership was allowed to operate under control of the new workers' state as a means of facilitating the restoration of a broken down economy. At the same time the abolition of landlordism and the distribution of land to the peasants brought the countryside into the mainstream of the revolution.

Apparently the stage of the bourgeois-democratic revolution turned out less protracted than the CCP leaders had anticipated. Presumably also the imperialist intervention by economic blockade acted to speed developments. At any rate, with the basic premise of land reform and economic reconstruction assured, the CCP put forward its general line of the transition to socialism. Where private enterprise of the national bourgeoisie operated under government control, they were now to be converted gradually from capitalist ownership to ownership of the whole people, a "step by step abolition of systems of exploitation and the building of a socialist society." State planning was instituted and industrialization became a prime necessity.

Alongside of these measures there was a corresponding reorganization of agriculture. Collectivization became a reality through a series of steps in which each new stage followed logically from the one preceding. These carried the peasantry from the early mutual aid teams, through the simple producer's cooperatives, to the socialist type of cooperatives and finally the communes, set up in 1958. Each stage provided sufficient time for verification and development to prove its progressively increasing value to the peasants, to agriculture and to society.

In this manner, the bourgeois-democratic revolution became the necessary preparation for the socialist revolution, and the socialist revolution was the inevitable outcome of the democratic revolution. As it unfolded, the democratic stage grew logically and without pause into the socialist stage, affirming in life the permanency of the revolution. The relationship of these two stages corresponded to Mao's conception of "two parts of an organic whole under the guidance of communist ideology." Correct leadership in this development the CCP attained through its clear understanding of both

the differences and the interconnections between the democratic and socialist revolutions.

This is the historic reality of the revolution by stages. What remains to be cleared up is: how can this be labelled a Stalinist conception? Since we cannot have any interest in hurling epithets at the Chinese party leaders, would it not be better for the International Secretariat to abandon this entirely unfounded characterization?

There can be no doubt about the great importance of this question. It is fundamental to Marxist concepts, i.e. Trotskyist concepts, of revolutionary strategy. For the Fourth International which has the duty to educate a new generation of revolutionists, errors or distortions on this question can have serious consequences, disorienting in nature. Conversely, the resolute intervention by Trotskyists in the great debate -- as the Secretariat resolution calls for -- and the possibilities of revolutionary reorientation and regroupment now opening up, demands clarity above all.

Some Conclusions

What is said here does not at all imply that none of the aspects of CCP leadership, past or present are subject to critical examination. I think they are in more ways than one, but any criticism to be worthy of the name must proceed from a correct basic appraisal of its position and actions as a first prerequisite.

No matter what criticism may now be made about it, nobody can deny that the Chinese Communist Party did enjoy the support of the mass of the people, and it did lead them in the struggle to overthrow the Kuomintang rule and lay the foundation for a socialist society. During the second Chinese Revolution which suffered terrible defeat in 1927, the CCP, under the leadership of Chen Tu-hsiu became a victim of Stalin's Menshevik policy. After this defeat the party made a 180 degree turn to a leftist adventurist position under the Li Li-san and later the Wang Ming leadership; it was exemplified by the ill-fated Canton Commune and the disastrous attempt to capture Changsha. This policy was not finally changed until 1935 by the establishment of the Mao Tse-tung leadership at the party conference at Tsunyi on the Long March from Kiangsi to Yen-an. None of the former party leaders were purged; they remained in responsible positions.

Through the hard school of irrepressible civil war, and war against the Japanese imperialist invasion, the party had to steel itself and learn the lessons that prepared it for the victory in 1949. Thus the change from failure and defeat under Stalin's policy to the struggle for power in defiance of the latter was the outcome of a process filled with both rich and bitter experiences. But the Mao Tse-tung leadership

remained at the helm to carry through the revolution which in its main course "followed objective laws long ago worked out by Trotsky."

This is the reality today, and it is established beyond refutation. But what happens to the assertion that this revolution was deformed? If such were actually the case, we should be obliged to admit that these objective laws have indeed proved faulty. Matters stand even worse with the various claims that the CCP leadership and its Peking regime is Stalinist. What terrible contradiction in theoretical concepts if such claims are given credence! A Stalinist leadership guiding and directing a revolution which in its main course "followed laws long ago worked out by Trotsky," and, moreover, leading to the establishment of a Stalinist regime -- how utterly ridiculous! This is more confusion than any party can tolerate. Therefore let us have done with this kind of nonsense.

Let us accept the inescapable conclusion. It demands steps necessary to end this confusion firstly, by dropping the absurdities about deformed revolution, Stalinist regime and political revolution in China; secondly by adopting a position of critical support to the Mao Tse-tung regime and its basic policies.

October 20, 1962

WHERE I DIFFER WITH COMRADE SWABECK
ON THE CHINA QUESTION

A Statement by John Liang

I find it necessary to differentiate myself from Arne Swabek in his new ideas about the history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) prior to the 1949 revolution, as evidenced particularly in his reply to Milton Alvin.

Comrade Swabek and I elaborated a common viewpoint which holds that the CCP, when it threw off the Moscow-imposed shackles of people's frontism and coalitionism, thereby ceased to be a Stalinist party (more accurately, a Stalinized party) as we had ~~always~~ previously understood it.

It was our joint view that the 1946-49 struggle for power marked a dividing point, a point of qualitative change, that saw the CCP become a genuine instrument of the socialist revolution. Subsequent developments confirmed this appraisal: the pursuit by the Peking government of a program of socialist reconstruction, its support of the continuing colonial struggle, its vigorous defense of Marxist-Leninist ideas on war and revolution.

Comrade Swabek has now gone beyond -- far beyond! -- this simple joint position. Disregarding or discounting the alternating adventurism and opportunism of the CCP leaders between 1927 and 1946 (the year in which the all-out struggle against the Kuomintang began), he depicts these leaders as brilliant strategists whose policies (with only minor, episodic exceptions) led logically, consistently and almost uninterruptedly to the revolutionary victory of 1949. Most notably, he endorses, at this late date, Mao Tse-tung's people's front policy during the period of the anti-Japanese war as a necessary stage in the revolutionary process.

I think a much more convincing case could be made for the contention that CCP policies were detrimental to the revolution, slowing it down and delaying the victory.

Moreover, if we were to accept Comrade Swabek's new views on people's frontism as it was practised in China, we would have to revise our view of people's frontism as it was practised by the Communist parties of Spain and France.

We would, in fact, have to discard our principled opposition to people's frontism.

For although Comrade Swabeck finds the people's front policy of Mao Tse-tung different from that of the Spanish and French Communist parties (in that the CCP retained its organizational independence and control over its own armed forces), the nub of the question is the basic common feature of the people's front as it appeared in reality in Spain, France and China: namely, the proclamation of class peace and the practice of class collaboration in place of class struggle.

The inevitable corollary of Comrade Swabeck's reevaluation of the CCP leaders and their policies is the discovery that their Trotskyist critics were almost as consistently in error as Mao and his colleagues were consistently correct. He downgrades Li Fu-jen, the only Trotskyist writer on the scene at the time, with the remark that he wrote in "the white heat of anger" over the crimes of Stalin -- meaning that he wrote subjectively. All Trotskyists, he says, shared Li Fu-jen's anger and extended it (without justification, he infers) to all Communist parties. Comrade Swabeck fails to recall that all these Communist parties, including the Chinese, eagerly accepted responsibility for Stalin's crimes. They praised all the vile acts of the genius-leader in the Kremlin and whipped up a lynch spirit against Stalin's revolutionary critics.

Comrade Swabeck has the record on his side when he points out that Trotskyist prognoses concerning China, including some made by Trotsky himself, were not borne out in life, notably in the question of the relative roles of the proletariat and the peasantry. He is right, too, when he points out that a political prognosis is conditional and to use Trotsky's graphic phrase, is not a promissory note one presents to history for payment. Even as a good physician cannot proceed without a working hypothesis as a tool of his trade, so Marxists make political prognoses as guides to policy and action.

Prognosis follows political analysis, Li Fu-jen's analyses of class forces in the Chinese revolution, and of the policies of the CCP, proceeded from the facts. They were shared by Trotsky and the entire international Trotskyist movement. They retain their essential validity. Had the CCP continued on a class-collaborationist course, there can hardly be any doubt that the Chinese revolution would

have been destroyed. Happily, Li Fu-jen's prognosis that the CCP could not regenerate itself was not borne out in life. Instead, the CCP put the helm over sharply and led a great revolution to victory.

It will prove rewarding to pursue a little further the question of prognoses and their verification. Revolutionary politics is not a simple process of prediction and fulfillment. While acknowledging that some of our prognoses proved wide of the mark, we should remember that we are in distinguished company. Marx and Engels did not live to see the disproof of Marx's prognosis that the socialist revolution would come first in a highly developed capitalist country (both thought of Germany or England). Lenin believed that unless the proletarian revolution quickly triumphed throughout most of Europe, world capitalism, already in an advanced stage of decay, would revive on the bones of the Russian revolution. The gaps between prediction and reality are enormous. Yet who among us would reject Marx and Engels, or Lenin and Trotsky? Is it not necessary, rather, to introduce the necessary corrections in our prognoses as life itself reveals them, and proceed from there?

There is not, in my judgment, any warrant for Comrade Swabeck's reconstructed image of the CCP and its leaders. In reevaluating the record, he relies not on newly-discovered facts, but on the carefully-edited writings of Mao Tse-tung, supplemented by the now stale reportage of such fellow-traveling liberals as Edgar Snow and Agnes Smedley. This is not good enough material from which to build a totally new conception of the CCP and its policies in the pre-1946 period.

The CCP today, despite any bureaucratic faults, is in my judgment a genuine party of the socialist revolution -- as genuinely so as the United Party of the Revolution in Cuba. In the case of China, of course, it is only too evident that the party leaders have not broken entirely with their Stalinist past, whereas the principal Cuban leaders had no Stalinist past. The CCP leaders still slander Trotsky and refer to Stalin in falsely eulogistic terms. Stalin's picture is still prominent in Peking parades. But let us not be deceived by these subjective hangovers. In politics, deeds count. The real political line is more important than words or gestures.

This said, it must be added that the cause of the socialist revolution can gain nothing from attempts to conceal in bright colors the dark spots in the CCP record, and to give a clean bill of health to such long-time Stalinists as Mao Tse-tung. This can only cloud the historical picture and render more difficult the task of reorienting the party on the China question.

Before concluding, I would like to say a few words about Comrade Alvin's effort to refute the Swabeck-Liang position on China by quoting Li Fu-jen's writings of long ago. This barren exercise, with its insistence on a credit for every debit, is more worthy of a bookkeeper than a socialist thinker. I suggest that Comrade Alvin study more carefully the facts about China, including those reported and analyzed by Li Fu-jen, and expend less effort on the juggling of quotations.

Finally, let me make it crystal clear that I continue to stand with Comrade Swabeck on the proposition that the CCP, by leading and continuing to lead a revolution, ceased to be a "Stalinist" party.

JOHN LIANG

November 25, 1962