

SWP

discussion bulletin

Published by the
SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

Vol. 24, No. 5

116 UNIVERSITY PLACE
NEW YORK 3, NEW YORK

February 1963

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
1. Critical Support or Political Revolution -- A Reply to Liang's Open Letter, by Milton Alvin	1
2. A Note on the Differences Between Swabeck and Liang, by Milton Alvin	8

15¢

CRITICAL SUPPORT OR POLITICAL REVOLUTION

A REPLY TO LIANG'S OPEN LETTER

by Milton Alvin

What began in our party as a dispute over the Communes system in China a few years ago, at the time of their formation, has now developed into an attempt to overthrow the fundamental doctrine of Trotskyism on the bureaucracies in the workers' states. This attempt to junk Trotskyism in favor of an adaptation to the bureaucracies is currently being made by Swabeck and Liang.

Thus Liang writes, "It is my firm conviction that the party is required by well-established facts as well as by theoretical considerations to alter its attitude toward China: to abandon the call for a 'political revolution' and to go over to a policy of critical support to the Peking government." (An Open Letter to All Members of the Socialist Workers Party, October 14, 1962.)

This view has been consistently put forward by Swabeck in discussions in the Los Angeles Local of the party. Swabeck has also extended this position to the Khrushchev regime in the Soviet Union. It is clear, therefore, that we are dealing with a revision of our fundamental position and not with a difference over the meaning of the Commune system or other subordinate questions. It should also be clear that the logic of the Swabeck-Liang position pulls them in the direction of extending their views to include all the bureaucracies in the workers' states.

In the course of making out a case for this revision in his Open Letter, Liang resorts to a combination of distortions of our position plus a general misunderstanding and misrepresentation of important elements of it. This is unfortunate because the only way the party can learn whether an old position should be maintained or altered is for critics and proponents, when there is disagreement, to state correctly each other's positions. Liang has not done this.

For example, he accuses the party of "... tending to make of it (the Bolshevik Revolution - M.A.) an idealized stereotype to which all future social revolutions are required to conform on pain of being branded 'Deformed.'" (Op. cit.) Liang chooses to ignore that we have never called

the Cuban revolution deformed although that revolution, the form it took, does not now and did not in its early stages, resemble the forms of the Russian Revolution at all. The bureaucratic deformation of revolutions has a deeper source and meaning than the anti-democratic forms of rule.

Deformed workers state is our designation for the existence of an economically privileged bureaucracy that has usurped power from the workers, using that power to defend its positions against all others. This is the deformation, not just the forms of rule. In any case, every revolution will produce a ruling body, office-holders, officials, etc. It is impossible to visualize anything else unless one is an anarchist and expects the new state apparatus to disappear on the morrow of the transfer of power from the capitalists to the workers. The problem is not in the existence of an officialdom or a bureaucracy, using the literal meaning of the latter as those who occupy the government bureaus, but in whose interests this officialdom acts. That is the nub of the problem.

Liang's assertion that we hesitated a long time before giving our endorsement to the Cuban Revolution because there were no Soviets there is incorrect. We supported the Cuban Revolution from the first day, as everyone knows. Nor have we ever insisted that every revolution follow, in its forms, the example of the Russian Revolution of 1917. What we have and always will advocate is that the heads of the state be controlled by the working masses. We were and are opposed to uncontrolled bureaucracies, not only because forms of rule are involved, but because experience has taught that uncontrolled bureaucracies build totalitarian forms of rule and adopt reactionary policies in order to maintain and extend their privileges.

We have never attempted to foretell what forms of rule should be adopted in any country that goes through a revolution. In each case, of course, the forms will correspond to actual conditions, traditions, and other factors. It is the essence of the matter that concerns us: are the rulers acting in the interests of the revolutionary masses or in the interests of special privileged groupings?

In the Cuban Revolution we have proposed that the leaders, who have shown themselves to be very responsive to the wishes of the masses and who have fought bureaucratic elements (Castro vs. Escalante), establish institutions of rule that reflect the situation that really exists there.

Evidently this process is going on, although slowly because of the critical situation of the country.

Liang wrongly states that we endorsed and supported the Chinese Revolution only in 1955, six years after the event. The party knows that we supported this revolution from the first day, that we defended it against all its imperialist enemies. The Korean War made the record clear in action: we supported the North Koreans and the Chinese who came to their aid against the U. N. imperialist attacks.

It is true that we only adopted a resolution on the Chinese Revolution in 1955 after considerable study and discussion. This document has in it the political conclusions that we still hold today. However, we did not wait to defend the revolution until we adopted the resolution. We defended it from the first and we still do.

Liang berates us because we believe the Peking regime is Stalinist-bureaucratic. I challenge him to explain why the Chinese leaders refer to themselves as Stalinists and why they think Stalin carried out Lenin's program in the Soviet Union.

Liang does not mention that Castro announced there would be no Stalinism in Cuba and has acted accordingly. On the other hand the Chinese leaders identify themselves with Stalin. These things have meaning to anyone who cares to look below the surface of names and labels and understand the real processes that are taking place.

Another misrepresentation by Liang in his Open Letter is that we "...almost gloated over China's immense economic troubles in company with the enemy press." I think the party has the duty to call Liang to order on this point. Apparently Liang prefers not to differentiate between the hostility of the imperialists towards the Chinese Revolution and our support of it despite our opposition to the ruling bureaucracy.

It is indeed unfortunate that the bureaucracies in the workers' states have given the enemy plenty of issues with which to attack various revolutions. In regard to this Trotsky taught us that we should tell the truth and not merely say "yes" when the capitalists say "no," and "no" every time they say "yes." He explained that if all that politics

consisted of was to say the opposite of what the capitalists were saying, every sectarian idiot would be a master strategist. Our job is to tell the workers the truth, even if it hurts, as it often does.

The imprisonment and execution of Chinese Trotskyists, by the Mao regime is a tragic matter. But the advice which Liang proffers to them, that is, those who still survive in Mao's jails, is worthless. He proposes that we drop the program of political revolution and advise them to do the same. Would they then have ways of functioning independently in China? There is no evidence that a Trotskyist party would be permitted to exist in China, where, we should keep in mind, the rulers think Stalin carried out Lenin's program in the Soviet Union.

In passing, Liang manages to distort, if not falsify, our conception of political revolution. He describes it as "...meaning the armed overthrow of the government." (Op. cit.) We advocate political revolution in the bureaucratized workers' states not as a slogan for immediate action, as Liang asserts while adding "armed overthrow," hitherto unmentioned by anyone but the Stalinists. We have a transitional program for these workers' states, adopted in 1938, parts of which were actually put into effect during the revolutionary uprising in Hungary in 1956.

The program includes legalization of soviet parties, revision of the planned economy, control of production by factory committees, freedom of the press and assembly and other demands. The idea of political revolution should be understood as the culmination of a process that includes the above transitional steps and results in a transfer of power from the uncontrolled bureaucracy to the working people. We have never looked upon political revolution as an armed uprising, necessarily. It is impossible to predict in what form the revolution will take place, that is, by armed rebellion, as it was attempted in Hungary, or in some other way. Suffice it to say we have never looked upon the political revolution in the way described by Liang and distorted by the Stalinists. It is entirely possible, in my opinion, that the weight of a working class can topple some of the bureaucracies without an armed rebellion. This nearly happened in Poland in 1956. The form in which the transfer of power will take place will very likely vary considerably from one country to another, depending upon concrete conditions in each country at the time.

Nevertheless, our transitional program for the bureaucratized workers' states, worked out by Trotsky almost a quarter of a century ago, is universally applicable, with modifications to suit concrete conditions.

The attempt of Swabek and Liang to get the party to abandon the program of political revolution in favor of critical support of the bureaucracies is in reality a capitulation to Stalinism and a junking of Trotskyism. The historical validity of Trotskyism, insofar as it applies to the workers' states, is that it has worked out a program of reviving revolutions, of winning democratic rights for the working masses and of adopting revolutionary internationalism as the program. Only Trotskyism has worked out these problems theoretically; no other tendency has even come close.

These are not just abstract conceptions but go right to the heart of the problems in the world today. What has held back the revolutionary conquest of the entire capitalist world is not just the strength of the capitalist classes but the aid they have received from the bureaucracies in the workers' states. These are dominated largely by reactionary nationalistic policies and their main interest in life is to hold on to privileged positions.

When we speak of Stalinist type regimes it does not necessarily mean that they have in equal respects all the abominable characteristics of the late tyrant's regime. The most important aspect of Stalinism is not the police regime he fastened upon the Soviet Union and spread to other countries. It is the expropriation of the workers from political power, the adoption of class-collaboration politics, the wrecking of the international communist movement and the maintenance of a privileged grouping that fights in every way it can to hold on to its position.

We do not have a single piece of evidence that any of the bureaucracies intends to reform itself out of existence. The adoption of the Swabek-Liang position of critical support implies these groupings, which are powerful social formations, can be reformed and that by a series of reforms they will disappear and be replaced by authentic revolutionary leaders. There can be no other perspective, if one adopts the position of critical support and rejects political revolution.

However, history has not given us a single example of any privileged grouping, whether a class or part of a class, that voluntarily gave up its position in society. We do have, on the other hand, a profusion of examples of every kind of social formation that fought bitterly with every weapon it could command to repel attempts to remove it from political power.

The outstanding characteristic of the labor and Soviet bureaucracy is its two-fold, contradictory nature. On the one hand it consists of a social formation with special interests of its own, particularly economic privileges which it seeks to protect and extend. On the other, it is based upon a workers' movement and/or nationalized economic system established by revolution. These nationalized economies, in the workers' states, and workers' movements in the capitalist states, must also be protected by the bureaucracies as their bases. They do this in their own special way.

There is no difference in principle between the bureaucracies in the American trade unions, for example, and those in the workers' states. Trotsky referred to the Soviet bureaucracy as a phenomenon we should understand as "...a trade union which has conquered power." (In Defense of Marxism, page 25).

We have no difficulty in supporting the progressive actions of the trade unions while opposing reactionary leaderships where they exist, as Trotsky also pointed out. No one has come up with the idea that the Meany-Reuther leadership in the AFL-CIO will some day reform itself out of existence, although they sometimes call a strike. Why can't Swabeck-Liang, as Trotsky advocated, adopt a similar policy toward the workers' states that are degenerated and deformed?

The difficulty with the Swabeck-Liang position is that they have been carried away by some reforms that the bureaucracies, mainly in the Soviet Union, Poland and Yugoslavia, have had to grant in response to mass pressures. The elimination of some of the worst abuses of the Stalin times has made Swabeck-Liang change their fundamental attitude toward these bureaucracies. They try to picture them as partially carrying out the Trotskyist program and moving further in that direction because of world conditions, implying they can go no other way. This is the same error that Radok, Pyatakov and others made in the Soviet Union in the late 1920's when they broke with Trotsky after Stalin made an expedient left turn. They thought Stalin had adopted Trotsky's

program (he did in part and in a distorted way) and adapted themselves to his regime. This resulted in their complete political ruin.

It would be difficult to find a surer way to liquidate our movement altogether than to adopt a program of adaptation to the labor bureaucracies of any kind. What the workers' movements need, both in the capitalist countries and workers' states, is a complete break with these bureaucracies and their politics. They need what we advocate: genuine Marxism-Leninism, that is, Trotskyism.

All those who started out as revolutionaries but adapted themselves to the bureaucracies ended up as completely in the camp of the latter as though they had started there. This is not the course we are going to take; the arguments of Swabeck-Liang notwithstanding.

The dividing line in the present discussion is now crystal clear: adaptation to Stalinism or Trotskyism.

January 13, 1963

A NOTE ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SWABECK AND LIANG

by Milton Alvin

The discussion of the Chinese question, in which one of the problems is to reconstruct the true history of the Chinese Communist Party, so badly distorted in the writings of Swabek and Liang, seems to have produced a division between them.

Hastily retreating from the unrestrained views of Swabek, which go further in the direction of an adaptation to Maoism and Stalinism every time he takes pen in hand, Liang tries to dissociate himself in part. In the article "Where I Differ With Comrade Swabek on the China Question" Liang admits, without stating so explicitly, that the version of the history of the Chinese Communist Party I described (*), from the time of the 1927 defeat until the period of the successful civil war (1946-1949) is correct.

* The Nature of the Chinese Communist Party, Discussion
Bulletin, Vol. 23, No. 8.

However, Liang's article raises some new questions. For example, if the true history of the CCP includes its many efforts to subordinate itself to the Kuomintang, as Li Fu-jen explained so many times and as Liang now approvingly recalls, how does it happen that he, Liang, finds it possible to sign a resolution together with Swabek which says the following: "...they (The Chinese C.P. -- M. A.) did not repeat the Stalinist policy of subordinating their party to the Kuomintang." (Draft Resolution * The Chinese Revolution -- Its Character and Development.)

This Draft Resolution is now before the party for discussion and action at the next national convention. If Liang now remembers the true history of the Chinese CP which he apparently had forgotten when he put his name to the unfortunate draft, he has the duty to the party to disavow his action.

Liang is also the co-author with Swabek of an article entitled "The Peking Regime and Stalinism," (Discussion Bulletin Vol. 22, No. 5) in which we are instructed that "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." Liang now writes, "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." (Where I Differ With Comrade Swabek on the China Question). Which is it, now? Liang will have to clarify where he stands.

Since Liang has discovered that Swabek 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" (op. cit.) it might be a good idea for him to take another look at where Swabek is leading him instead of offering needless admonitions to others.

Finally, a word is required in reply to Liang's inference that there is a difference between a bookkeeper and a socialist thinker that is somehow unbridgeable. This is not only a slur on those who make their living keeping books; it is unworthy of a party leader. At any rate, I have no reason to conceal the fact that I became a socialist more than 27 years ago when I happened to be a bookkeeper and accountant. One of the things I learned in those days that I think has stood me in good stead is that to be a good bookkeeper, one has to deal with facts. A set of books that reflects not facts but falsehoods is worthless. I recommend to Comrade Liang that he try to balance his own books in the present discussion by thinking through the contradictions in his position. At the same time it would not do him any harm to use his own advice to me to study more carefully the writings of Li Fu-jen.

While Liang tries to clear his skirts of Swabek, at least in part, the latter has attempted a reply to the carefully documented refutation I made of his view of the history of the Chinese Communist Party in my article "The Nature of the Chinese Communist Party." Unfortunately, Swabek is thrashing about in a quagmire, getting in deeper all the time.

It would be mere repetition to go over the many errors in his new article, "On Evaluating the Chinese Revolution." I shall only attempt here to deal with a limited number of points, some of those that have not been raised previously in this discussion.

Comrade Swabek either does not understand or does not want to understand that when we stated in the resolution adopted at our 1961 national convention that the Chinese and Cuban revolutions "...followed objective laws long ago worked out by Trotsky," we were not referring to the nature of the Chinese and Cuban parties. The reference is clearly to the objective course of development in the two countries, that is, the overthrow of the old regimes, the securing of national independence, the nationalizations, the planning introduced into the economies, etc.

Comrade Swabek writes that I may have overlooked the characterization. I didn't, but even if I had missed it somehow, he has surely reminded me of it at least two dozen times in discussions as well as in his article. Also, I think the misunderstanding of the real meaning of the quotation is all with him and not with me. "Objective laws" refers to the confirmation of the laws of Trotsky's theory of the Permanent Revolution which attempts to foretell the course of development in history, and of course, does not attempt to guess at the nature of the political parties that find themselves instruments in these developments. We look upon parties, in the present context, as the subjective factor, a fact that Swabek has either forgotten or chooses to ignore.

Liang has already refuted Swabek's approval of the Chinese Communist Party's Peoples Front policy in the mid-1930's, in part. I would like to add that none of the Trotskyists of those days, beginning with Trotsky himself, took the position now taken by Swabek. They all condemned the Peoples Front policy in China, as well as everywhere else, in the most vigorous manner. Swabek's new position distorts the facts and makes it appear as though the CCP was offering a joint struggle in cooperation with the Kuomintang against the Japanese imperialists in the same way that Lenin and Trotsky offered to fight jointly alongside the forces of Kerensky against Kornilov in Russia in 1917.

The facts are easily obtainable in Trotsky's "History of the Russian Revolution" and where I have quoted extensively from Trotskyist authorities in my previously mentioned article. It only remains to note that in the 1930's the Stalinists were trying to justify their subordination to capitalist parties, such as the Democratic Party here and the Kuomintang in China, with the very same explanations about Kerensky and

Kornilov. The argument was false then, just as it is now.

Swabeck's article contains one point that for sheer confusion would be hard to beat. He writes approvingly of the negotiations of the Chinese C.P. with the Kuomintang after the Japanese surrender (1945) and likens it to the negotiations of a union on strike with the employer. Where the similarity comes in is left in the dark. The Chinese Stalinists were negotiating with Chiang Kai-shek in order to form a coalition government in which they were to be junior partners, and incidentally, more captives than partners, as they proved to be in France and Italy in the same period. This would have been a betrayal as it was in the European countries. Only the stubbornness of Chiang prevented the coalition from ever seeing the light of day; the CCP leaders were willing enough.

On the other hand, when a union negotiates with an employer, during a strike or not, its aim is not to become a junior partner in the business and thereby give up its reason for being. They are negotiating, presumably, to gain something for the workers. It should be clear that in the two examples cited by Swabeck there are fundamental differences in the aims and not similarities.

As a final point, I wish to state for the record that Swabeck's efforts to grab a monopoly on recognition that a great revolution took place in China will not work. I and many others also think it was a great revolution, one that changed the world relationship of forces and set free and inspired movements that have made and will continue to make enormous contributions to the world struggle for socialism. The Chinese Revolution, with all its shortcomings, I think is the second greatest event of the 20th Century, outranked only by the first successful proletarian revolution in Russia in 1917.

But this appreciation should not blind us to the obvious shortcomings, among which is the party that led the Chinese Revolution and continues to lead it. We would not be scientists, that is, Marxists, if we ignored all the facts or some of the facts that are distasteful to us. The best service we can do for the Chinese as well as all other revolutions is to tell the truth -- all the truth.

The importance, even the urgency, of emphasising the 1927-1946 history of the Chinese Communist Party flows from the following: This was the period during which the workers

were defeated in many parts of the world in battles that fundamentally affected the course of history. The Nazis triumphed in Germany, the uprising of the French workers was put down, the Spanish revolution lost to Franco, among the more important instances. In each of these defeats the primary blame rests upon the Stalinists and their false policies.

The Chinese C.P. has already disavowed the incorrect policies of its 1925-1927 days that led to a disastrous defeat. But they falsely blamed Chen Tu-hsiu for the debacle. The real blame belongs to Stalin and Bukharin and their factions which were in control of the Communist International at the time. The C.I. forced its class-collaboration policy upon the young Communist Party of China, then headed by Chen, who was also its founder. These policies were accepted by Chen and the C.C.P. only with the greatest reluctance. The inclinations of the Chinese were towards a correct, independent policy during the revolution. Had they been left alone by the Stalinists in Moscow, they very likely would have seen the revolution through to a successful conclusion. Only the great prestige of the Russian Revolution convinced them to go along with the advice from Moscow which they mistakenly took for good coin. In those days it was not generally known outside the Soviet Union that the authentic revolutionists, headed by Trotsky, were without any influence in the International and even without information as to what was taking place in China.

Following the defeat of 1927, the Chinese Communist Party continued to follow a course laid down by the Stalinist leaders in Moscow. This course was an ultra-left policy until the middle 1930's and a Peoples Front policy with Chiang Kai-shek in the subsequent years until the civil war of 1946-1949.

Since the Chinese Communist Party today enjoys complete control over the country it would not cost them anything to go back over the past and correct their errors. They should start at the very beginning, the 1925-1927 days. If they did this, they would accomplish a number of highly progressive things. First of all, they would re-educate their own people in the Leninism they pretend to stand for. Second, they would make an enormous contribution to the clarification of many of the issues now in dispute in the world among all the Communist parties. Third, and perhaps of greatest importance, they would contribute to the education of the many millions in all countries who confront and will confront many of the problems that

faced the Chinese from 1925 on. Finally, they would once for all bury the remains of Stalinism as a tendency in revolutionary politics.

The fact that the Chinese leaders not only make no effort to go back and make these corrections but actually defend their errors of the past or try to attribute them to others such as Chen Tu-hsiu, speaks volumes about their real ideas and outlook. A party that cannot or will not correct its past errors cannot be relied upon to follow a correct course in the present and future.

January 13, 1963