

THE MINORITY POSITION ON CHINA AND RELATED QUESTIONS

By Arne Swaback

Since the Bolshevik victory in the Russian Revolution the world has been divided into two mutually antagonistic systems -- the socialist and the capitalist. Further revolutionary developments intensified the hostility between the conflicting forces. This process entered a new stage and attained greater dimensions as the victorious Chinese revolution catalyzed a number of upheavals that led to political independence of colonial peoples and to the establishment of workers states in North Korea, North Vietnam and Cuba.

The Chinese revolution is a continuation and extension of the Russian revolution. It marks the second major advance of the world revolution which has put an end to the series of defeats ushered in by the triumph of Stalinism. For colonial movements aspiring to enter the path of socialist construction, the Peoples Republic of China is a powerful pole of attraction. Peking has taken the place once occupied by Moscow as the world's revolutionary center in which the Communist Party leaders are hosts to representatives of workers and peasants from all parts of the globe, who come to seek inspiration, advice and support.

From the exploiters of labor and the exploiters of colonial peoples this has unleashed fierce hatred and violent attacks against the CCP. In fact, the struggle today between revolutionary China and American imperialism -- the most ruthless of the exploiters -- has become the epicentre in all major developments of international class conflicts. Increasingly it tends to overshadow all other aspects of the present world situation.

The recognition of Peking as a world revolutionary center has not escaped Washington imperialist circles. Their ambitions in the Pacific and access to exploitation of the material riches of the Orient are blocked by this center. Both in theory and practice the Chinese leaders seek to defend their revolution by means of its extension. Consequently, they emphasize the paramount importance of carrying the proletarian struggle to victory in the capitalist world, and they link this up in intimate connection with the struggle of colonial peoples. Their call for international working class solidarity sounds loud and clear. In Asia, Africa and Latin America,

the Chinese, motivated by their concept of uninterrupted revolution, remain critical of ruling native colonial puppets and support the movements of popular revolt.

History has already illuminated the dialectics of the interrelation between revolutionary China and imperialist America. For some time it has been most sharply focused by the barbaric intervention of U. S. military forces in the Vietnam civil war. In various forms it pervades other parts of the globe, including the gunboat diplomacy in Santo Domingo. The power of American capitalism, both monetary and military, sustains the rule of fascist dictators, colonial puppets and other reactionary elements, while the Chinese Communists have taken the lead in ideological, political and material support to world-wide revolutionary developments. In this interrelationship the Kremlin bureaucracy was caught in the middle. Its particular brand of peaceful coexistence failed at the crucial point; straddling the issues of conflict between revolutionary China and American imperialism became increasingly difficult.

In the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute the Kremlin suffered serious reverses. The CPSU lost influence and prestige to such an extent that this threatened disintegration of its authority among other Communist parties. These were the basic reasons for the downfall of Khrushchev. Ideologically and politically the Kremlin was outflanked from the left by the Chinese, who reasserted the principles of socialist internationalism.

More important yet, the resolute stand for Marxist-Leninist concepts by the Chinese leaders has provided a stimulus to the revolutionary reorientation of Communist-minded workers in the capitalist world as they regroup to seek anew the path to the socialist revolution. This is a development of great historic significance; it offers immense possibilities, for it restores a living movement that is once again polarized around the principle of socialist internationalism, and the problems of the socialist revolution; it is world wide in scope and its forces are to be found either as splitoffs from the Communist parties or as young, viable currents within them in many countries. In the United States, our party forfeited a unique opportunity to act as the independent ally of the Chinese revolution. Progressive Labor has become the most prominent organizational expression of this new movement in America.

What is our party leadership's attitude to these developments? How well has this attitude been able to stand up? The majority resolution, "The SWP Position on China", adopted at the last convention, has never been published, and is not likely to be published. That is precluded by the false conclusions drawn, for these can neither stand the light of day nor be defended in public.

"The SWP Position on China" grants that it is a workers state, and it grants that "the progress of the Third Chinese Revolution has supplied massive positive confirmation of the laws of the permanent revolution."

But the Chinese workers state, according to the SWP position, "is not, as its leaders claim, a People's Democracy, but a bureaucratic autocracy elevated above the worker-peasant masses in whose name it rules...it is bureaucratic in its inner life as in its method of ruling the country." To these charges are added complaints about "the CP's commandism...reckless haste and disregard for the welfare of the peasant population," without a shred of substantiating evidence submitted.

Obviously the Chinese workers and peasants think otherwise. That much is attested by all objective observers who, without exception, point to the support of the regime by the overwhelming majority of the population.

The actual situation, according to these observers, shows the Chinese revolution still retaining the basic characteristics of a mass movement without rigid divisions between rulers and ruled. Leading cadres of the state institutions, the party and cultural organizations participate in physical labor alongside the rank and file in fields and factories. Conversely, productive workers take part in planning and administrative functions. In the army differences in military rank are abolished and all eat out of the same rice bowl.

In the People's Communes, governmental power is combined with production. The communes form both the upper levels of the combined farming co-operatives and also the lowest level of state power at the township base. These self-governing entities plan and carry out their many-sided activities in agriculture, local industry and public works. They survey the resources of their township and have the state power to use them.

Productive labor is integrated with military training in the people's militia which counts many millions in its ranks, including both men and women. Reports out of China show intensified military training caused by the heightened tension of the constantly escalated American imperialist intervention in Vietnam. The people's militia expresses the reality of a people in arms ready to defend the revolution and, incidentally, contemptuously refute the charge of "a bureaucratic autocracy elevated above the worker-peasant masses."

Nevertheless, the notion about a bureaucratic autocracy in Peking led the authors of "The SWP Position on China" further away from basic Trotskyist principles. That is made amply clear by the following declaration:

"For these reasons the political line of the revolutionary Marxists remains one of political revolution aiming at a thoroughgoing democratization. This requires intransigent opposition to the holders of power, not reconciliation with them or adaptation to their regime. A new party will have to be formed to conduct that struggle."

At another point it is stated: "There are no legal means, no institutional channels through which the direction and policies of the one party state can be changed or corrected in a peaceful way."

These are the false conclusions contained in the "SWP Position on China" that cannot be defended in public. They proceed from a definition of the Peking regime that is contrary to its origin and development. The result is an attempt to subordinate the facts of history to the preconceived notions and deep-seated prejudices of the majority party leaders.

Following Trotsky's leadership, we accepted the idea of political revolution as the logical outcome of the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union. We attributed the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and its crystallization into a privileged caste, to the conditions of a particular historical juncture. Most outstanding were the economic backwardness of the country, its isolation in a hostile capitalist world, heavy working class losses in the civil war, and the unavoidable internal retreat to the New Economic Policy.

International developments pushed with mighty force in the same direction, through a series of working class defeats. But, as Trotsky pointed out, there was in these events not only a chronological, but also a causal connection which worked in two directions: "The leaders of the bureaucracy promoted the defeats; the defeats promoted the rise of the bureaucracy." Still, for the Stalinist bureaucracy to triumph in the Soviet Union, it had to strangle the Leninist party and destroy physically the whole generation that led the revolution to victory under Lenin and Trotsky.

In this manner we interpreted the Stalinist degeneration on historical materialist grounds. For us the rise of Stalinism signified a parasitic growth, a usurpation of powers by a police regime, leading to the logical necessity of a political revolution.

However, an interpretation of the conditions and development of the Chinese revolution on historical materialist grounds points inevitably in the opposite direction -- it points to the necessity of political solidarity with the Peking regime, and assignment of criticism to an educational role, especially concerning that area in which Trotskyist critique for Soviet history is decisive.

The Peking regime does not represent a usurpation of powers; in fact, those who make up this regime are the very same people who led the revolution to victory, who established nationalized economy, state planning, industrialization and the transformation of agricultural relations. They set policies in which China became a powerhouse extending the revolution through the colonial areas of Asia, Africa, and all the way to Cuba.

Moreover, these are the same leaders who in the Sino-Soviet dispute advanced the Marxist-Leninist position against the Kremlin brand of peaceful coexistence with imperialism; they effectively defended the revolutionary road to workers power against the revisionist parliamentary illusions emanating from Moscow. Today the Peking regime has mobilized the mighty powers unleashed by the revolution to stand up to American imperialism and challenge its aggression in every field, including the internal aggression against the Negro people in this country.

The course of developments in China shows a revolution in gestation, unfolding, maturing -- not the degeneration of a victorious proletarian power. It is the opposite of what brought the brutal Stalinist regime into being. On the world arena Stalin began his climb toward power by opposition to the German revolution in 1923; Mao's first international action was to aid materially and militarily the revolutionary forces in the Korean civil war. And for all the differences with the Bolshevik triumph prior to the Stalin era, the course of the Chinese revolution remains still in the October stage. There is no Thermidor.

Considering these developments of the Chinese revolution, it is preposterous for the SWP to propose a program of political revolution and the formation of a new party to conduct a struggle to overthrow the Peking regime.

A policy of political revolution arising out of the need to combat the monstrous Thermidorian regime that usurped power in the Soviet Union by the physical annihilation of Lenin's co-workers is arbitrarily and schematically applied by the party majority leaders against a fundamentally revolutionary regime. Thus a method entirely foreign to our tradition is introduced into the party. It should be repudiated, for it marks a complete departure from basic Trotskyist principles, and basic Marxist principles.

The whole world knows that the Chinese government is committed to the defense of Vietnam, with whatever means required, against American imperialist aggression. Yet our party promotes the idea of overthrowing this government, for that is what political revolution means. How will the majority leaders justify this idea before the Vietnamese liberation fighters? How will they defend it before the American radical public?

This question is directly related also to the Negro movement in the United States. The leaders of revolutionary China, acting on behalf of a great power, have pledged their unequivocal support for the Freedom Now struggle. They have inspired and given political and material assistance to colonial revolutionary forces -- the friends and allies of the Negro people. With equal consistency they oppose and expose the oppressive nature of American

imperialism -- the bitter enemy of the Negro people.

These facts are well known to the vanguard elements in the struggle for Freedom Now. Among them such representatives as Robert F. Williams and William Worthy identify with the Chinese revolution. Malcolm X, before he died declared: "Chinese will be the future leading political tongue of the world." Black people in increasing numbers follow their example. This lends further emphasis to the need for a change in the same direction of the party position on China.

The party's false position on the role and the character of the Peking regime has produced its logical extension into other aspects of our attitude to the Chinese revolution. Once we depart from one basic principle the road is open to violate more of them; and that is what has happened.

An article in the Militant of Dec. 28, 1964, attempted to picture what is called Mao's "assurances of the correctness of Stalin's war on Trotskyism" as a means of angling for a deal with American imperialism. This scurrilous charge was repeated and spelled out more completely in the Militant of Feb. 1, 1965. Referring to the withdrawal of Cuban students from Rumania because the government, while seeking a rapprochement with the United States, banned their projected rally in celebration of the Cuban revolution, the author adds this interpretation:

"Will Peking, which has been talking magnificently about Leninism, now remind the Rumanians of the need to adhere to basic principles? Will Mao and his team choose to draw the attention of the Rumanians to the dangers of Titoism? Or will they choose to remain silent, thereby implying their own readiness to bargain with American imperialism at the expense of others?"

At first glance, these crude insinuations may seem like mere sniping; but there is much more involved. The abusive taunts were hurled at Peking at the very moment when the Chinese leaders were preoccupied with problems far more serious than the presence of Cuban students in Rumania. They faced the armed might of American imperialism arrayed in full scale war posture along the shores of their country, and conducting actual bomb attacks on North Vietnam.

Our party is committed to the fundamental Trotskyist principle of unconditional defense of workers states against imperialist attacks. It forms a keystone in our programatic structure. Yet we failed in the real test of this commitment. Instead of rallying to China's defense the Militant did the exact opposite. Instead of extending our hands in international class solidarity, the Militant hurled scurrilous insinuations against China. This also was a sorry departure from basic Trotskyist principles.

If we accept the characterization of the Chinese Peoples Republic as a workers state, there can be no doubt about the need to defend it against imperialist attacks; we must state so in terms sufficiently clear for all to understand. For proletarian internationalists, this is an elementary duty. Between this duty and the problem of building an effective revolutionary party, there is a clear and unmistakable connection. For surely, to conquer new positions of working class power, we must have the will and the capacity to defend existing conquests.

The departure from basic Trotskyist principles began a few years ago.

When the Soviet Union, in 1961, resumed nuclear bomb testing, the Militant of Sept. 4 and 11, carried a pacifist editorial; it placed equal blame for atomic weapons testing on the Soviets and on imperialism. Although "Kennedy's stepped-up preparation for war" was noted, the editorial went on to declare it a "criminal action for Moscow to resume testing, still more so since it helped Washington to resume testing."

We are now, and we were then, well aware that the danger of unleashing a nuclear holocaust emanates not from the Soviet Union, but from American imperialism. We recognize, or we should recognize that the Soviet Union has a right and a duty to defend itself against imperialist war threats with the most effective weapons that scientific efforts can provide.

When Trotsky was Commissar for War, in the young Soviet Republic, poison gas was the most terrible type of military weapon. About it, Trotsky had this to say:

"Let Soviet science give us gases and counter-gases such as will deprive the civilized beasts of prey of all desire to make attempts on our independence and our labor."

Today that declaration needs to be reformulated and repeated. Let Soviet science and Chinese science develop and test nuclear weapons in order to hold at bay the civilized beasts of prey. Nevertheless, in reply to our protests, the majority party leadership justified the editorial and insisted that the issue was not "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union," but the fact that Kremlin policy "makes military defense paramount and subverts political defense into an adjunct of Soviet diplomacy."

But this was Kremlin policy under Stalin's rule, and Trotsky consistently maintained that there must be no equivocation in our stand for unconditional defense of the Soviet Union against imperialist attacks -- unconditional, that is, regardless of the policy of the Kremlin.

In its departure from fundamental principles the party faces a clear danger of total disorientation, for one unacknowledged and uncorrected error inevitably leads to others. This was indicated most sharply in the treatment of the Kennedy assassination. The reaction was one of panic, not the sober response of confident leaders. So great was the disarray that class lines were obliterated, to the detriment of the education of young comrades in the politics of class struggle.

It was not proper for the party, through its public organ or otherwise, to "extend our deepest sympathy" to Mrs. Kennedy and her children. Such expressions, on an individual basis, where they reflect real sympathy, are acceptable. When the party does it, that is a political act implying political solidarity. The class line is obliterated.

Said the party statement: "Political differences within our society must be settled in an orderly manner." That staid and respectable admonition is worthy of a liberal or a social democrat, not of revolutionary Marxists who know that basic political antagonisms are never settled in any such manner. While it is not necessary or advisable at all times and under all circumstances to proclaim or underline the violence of social change, it is impermissible to preach the opposite, for that is to deceive.

The party statement went on, "Before all others, it is the federal government's duty to block the attempt to use the Dallas tragedy for the staging of an ever more devastating witch-hunt." There spoke the voice of panic -- and absurdity. For earlier in the same declaration it was correctly said: "The cornerstone of the hate edifice was laid 20 years ago by government figures and Congressmen with the commencement of the great witch-hunt." So the party adopted the strange position of appealing to the professional witch-hunters not to stage a new witch-hunt. Again the class line was obliterated.

"Before all others," the party statement insisted, "it is the duty of the federal government to furnish the people with a thoroughgoing analysis of the atmosphere of hate and violence which fostered that tragedy." No, it was the duty of the revolutionary party, before all others, to furnish such an analysis. The federal government and the capitalist state function to uphold and defend the interests of the capitalist class. Instead of reminding the ruling class of what we mistakenly imagine to be its "duty", it would be better to remind ourselves once again of the basic Marxist concept of the nature of the state.

But as the party majority leaders grew soft politically, they tended to harden their internal administrative attitude. Expulsions of young members on charges of disloyalty, based merely on hyperbolic remarks about the party in private group documents, have taken the place of our formerly honored method of attempting to educate the youth and permit minority opinions. Members of the Milwaukee branch were charged with irresponsibility and accused of hostility toward the party youth when they took normal measures against a dishonest interloper who had absconded with money belonging to a defense fund and money borrowed from the comrades. No other motivation can possibly be ascribed to such censures than that of unrestrained factional retaliation against minorities. In fact, the mere expression of a dissenting minority opinion immediately encounters hostile factional attacks from majority leaders. This tends to prevent the objective discussion that is essential to internal party life.

A proposal to formalize this type of administrative regime, and incorporate it into the party organizational structure, is presented to the convention under the title "Draft Resolution on the Organizational Character of the SWP."

It represents a rationalization of the above mentioned organizational measures. Among the several correct concepts propounded in this document, there are also calls for organizational tightening up and warnings against any attempt to subvert the principle of majority rule -- a principle that does not seem at all endangered.

Considerable emphasis is placed on party loyalty. For disciplined members party loyalty grows out of conviction; it cannot be legislated by organizational provisions or rules of conduct. Party loyalty becomes a reality whenever it is founded on clear comprehension of the historical necessity and the historical role of the revolutionary party and its response to the needs of the working class.

Implicitly if not explicitly, this document conveys a certain fear of internal discussion. The stress is on limitations of discussion -- which truly reflects the practice established by the majority party leaders.

When Trotsky was still with us, the party went through frequent and intense internal discussions from which the party gained in understanding and firmness of principle. Lenin's party, so often referred to as our model, was not at all chary about internal discussions, or eager to set rigid limitations. Quite the contrary. In debates on practically all of the great actions undertaken by the Bolsheviks different tactical or strategic lines clashed; there was frankness of expression. Many of the important deliberations, with opinions pro and con, were fully recorded in the public press.

A revolutionary party develops through internal struggle. Contradictory views and opinions constantly arise as a result of pressure from conflicting class forces. Without discussion and ideological struggle to resolve these differences, internal party life will come to an end.

At present this aspect of party development needs especial emphasis because of the various and divergent currents of thought and action that have now become so pronounced in the world Trotskyist movement.

The logical opposite arising out of the disorientation in the SWP on fundamental principles showed up in abstention from important anti-imperialist actions. Most outstanding

was the failure to support and participate in the student trips in mass defiance of the Cuba travel ban. Twice available, the ways and means to take advantage of this opportunity were turned down by the majority party leaders.

Since its early stages of development we have established a record of genuine defense of the Cuban revolution. What could be more natural than to follow-up as supporters and participants in the travel ban defiance? Its exceptional significance was demonstrated most graphically by the spirited welcome accorded the students in Cuba; there they were greeted as comrades in arms, and at home in the U.S., upon their return, they faced the hostile reception by the imperialist agencies, the HUAC, the Grand Jury, etc. A correct policy of collaboration in the travel ban defiance would have provided an excellent chance for young Trotskyists to study a revolution at first hand, in actual life, and take part in an effective anti-imperialist action.

Nevertheless, prior to the first student trip to Cuba, the Political Committee meeting of June 3, 1963, decided otherwise.

Motion was made: "That we support the attempt to organize a mass student defiance of the Cuba travel ban. That individual participation be determined through consultation with the N.O." The motion was lost.

Motion was made: "The P.C. inform all party branches that no member of the party is to become involved in any project aimed at defying the travel ban to Cuba without prior consultation and approval of the P.C." -- The motion was carried.

This decision was a serious mistake; the effect was to tell party members to lay off. And strange as it may seem, no reason for this abstentionism could be valid; not even that of the travel ban defiance being initiated by Progressive Labor.

Yet, this is but one example of the generally wrong attitude shown by the majority party leaders to Progressive Labor. At the present time, its members are being subjected to especially vicious persecution by the New York City authorities. Our reaction, up to now, has been mere perfunctory information in the Militant as if involved was merely some discomfort to a disagreeable rival. This is a dangerous

deception. What is involved is a sanguinary attack by capitalist reaction intended to silence and if possible smash any attempt to champion revolutionary ideas and actions. The least we can do is to adopt a policy of working class solidarity toward Progressive Labor and join in a united front of genuine and active support for defense measures.

We have become accustomed over a period of years to being the only party in the United States capable of attracting workers who learn to accept revolutionary ideas. This is no longer the case. Ever changing reality is once again asserted. Out of the revolutionary regeneration initiated by the Chinese Communist Party in its ideological struggle with the Kremlin, Progressive Labor has emerged as a part of the world-wide left regroupment around problems of the socialist revolution.

This is the new reality, and it is manifested concretely in the existence of a competing revolutionary organization. The program of Progressive Labor, its stated aims and objectives in the class struggle parallel our own. Since this is the case, our thinking must reflect the needs of this reality, and the corresponding political conclusions must be drawn to the full. For Marxists, this is axiomatic.

More than two years ago Progressive Labor called for the formation of "a vanguard Leninist party that can lead millions in mass movements against imperialism." It invited all who share this goal to join in common discussions and common efforts. Though Progressive Labor made criticism of the Trotskyists it presented an open, frank and non-factional attitude. But instead of greeting the extended invitation as a progressive development and engage in fraternal discussion of the proposed objective, the majority party leaders have remained bitterly hostile and factional toward Progressive Labor.

Though belated, the party can still accept the invitation. We do not propose this be done uncritically. We have disagreements with Progressive Labor in certain areas of political concepts, but these should be subject to mutual discussion. And joint efforts toward the formation of a larger and more effective revolutionary party should be viewed as a challenge; it is intimately related to our often stated conviction that, "the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership."

Our conclusion from this development should be expressed in a policy of friendly collaboration with Progressive Labor in pursuance of concrete class objectives, wherever feasible, while exploring, at the same time, the possibilities of fusion. This could become the first step toward the formation of such a vanguard Leninist party; and this first step should be undertaken regardless of present mutual recriminations.

A fusion of proletarian internationalists on the basis of solidarity with the Chinese revolution, with the Cuban revolution, and with the Algerian revolution should be considered not only as feasible, but as a necessary point of departure for our participation in the world-wide revolutionary reorientation and regroupment. It should be viewed as our contribution toward the solution of the historical crisis of mankind.

Since the beginning of American Trotskyism we have looked forward to the day when in this country left currents would crystallize out of the broader movement and present an opportunity for fruitful collaboration and then fusion in a larger and more effective American party. We prepared ourselves to take advantage of such a development. Our fusion with the Muste group and our period of entry into the Socialist Party were examples of the practical realization of this outlook.

Trotsky's thinking about the formation of the Fourth International went along similar lines. He visualized it as being composed not only of Trotskyists; and as a practical demonstration of his views, he suggested that Chen Tu-hsiu be invited to the founding conference, even though we then had serious differences with the latter.

Today the United Secretariat of the Fourth International has voiced its desire for an alliance "with all the young, viable forces, the Communist tendencies of the pro-Chinese left."

But this basic idea found more distinct expression in the statement our party adopted on March 1, 1963, entitled, "For Early Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement." The statement declared:

"New currents developed under the influence of the victory in Cuba, are groping their way to revolutionary socialism, and seeking to apply the main lessons of the colonial revolution to their own situation. The Algerian revolution has had a similar effect on the vanguard of the African revolutionary nationalist movement. To meet these leftward moving currents, to work with them, even to combine with them without giving up any principles, has become an imperious necessity."

A correction must be made here. While these leftward moving currents are influenced by both the Cuban and the Algerian revolutions, the more exact term, and the one that is more in line with world reality, is "the Communist tendencies of the pro-Chinese left." But the idea expressed in the party statement should be applied as it stands, namely: To meet these leftward moving currents, to work with them, even to combine with them without giving up any principles, still remains an imperious necessity.

To sum up, our tendency is submitting to the party convention a motion calling for a definite turn of party policy in two important areas as follows:

1. The program of political revolution for China, which flowed from a false conception of the character of the regime, must be discarded in favor of critical support to the regime and backing for its basic policies, both domestic and international. Criticism of Chinese views and practices with which we disagree (such as, for example, the defense of Stalin as a person), should be assigned to an educational role and expressed with the general framework of political solidarity within the regime.

2. Toward Progressive Labor we must adopt a policy of friendly united front type collaboration on issues in the class struggle wherever feasible, definitely oriented, however, to exploration of the possibilities of fusion with Progressive Labor in a larger and more effective revolutionary party.

Submitted on behalf of the Pro-Chinese Tendency

June 1, 1965