

The Sino-Russian Conflict and the Opposition

By L. D. TROTSKY

On July 27th, I gave the following answer to a questionnaire of an American news agency:

"As to Soviet-Chinese relations, I can voice my opinion, of course, only in the capacity of a private individual. Outside of the newspapers, I have no access to sources of information. In such matters, newspaper reports are always unsatisfactory. There can be no doubt that aggression is being manifested by the Chinese and not by the Russian government. The regime of the Chinese Eastern Railway is a fact that dates back a number of years. Those workers' organizations that have been attacked by the Chinese government do not exist since yesterday either. The organization of the Chinese Eastern Railway lines was based on the thoroughgoing work executed by a special committee of which I was the chairman. The resolutions passed by this committee were ratified in April 1926. They protect Chinese interests in every respect.

"The attitude of the present Chinese regime may be explained by the fact that it has become strong by reason of its defeat of the workers and peasants. What caused the defeat of the revolutionary movement of the Chinese people—of this I am not going to speak here since I have given a full account of these causes in articles already published. Governments that have emerged from crushed revolutions usually display weakness before those forces against which the revolution was directed. In this case, first of all before English and Japanese imperialism. For this reason, the Chinese government, in order to show its strength, had to make a threatening, adventurist gesture towards its revolutionary neighbor.

"The question is whether this provocation growing out of the defeat of the Chinese revolution will of necessity result in war. I do not think so, because the Soviet government does not want war and the Chinese cannot make war.

"Chiang Kai-Shek's army achieved victories in 1925-27 thanks to the uprising of the masses. However, when the army turned against them, it forfeited its main source of strength. As a purely military organization, his army is extremely weak. Chiang Kai-Shek cannot help knowing that the Soviet government is well aware of the weakness of his armed forces. It is beyond his power to wage war against the Red Army without the help of other countries. In other words, he could fight Russia only if his army were a subsidiary of other armies. I do not believe that such a combination is likely at the present time, chiefly because of the circumstance that the Soviet government is seriously bent upon straightening out things by peaceful means.

"It goes without saying that were the Soviets to engage in war, the opposition would devote itself completely to the defense of the October revolution."

I believed that in this answer I had expressed the standpoint of the whole Left Communist Opposition. I regret to say that this is not altogether the case. Individuals and groups have come forward in the opposition that, on the occasion of the first serious political test, have taken either an indecisive or a basically false stand, opposed to their own revolutionary opposition camp, and one which brought them very near to the camp of the social democracy.

In No. 26 of the *Fahne des Kommunismus*, there was printed an article written by one H. P. According to this article the conflict was caused by an encroachment upon China's right of self-determination on the part of the Soviet republic; in other words, it was in substance a defense of Chiang Kai-Shek. I shall not deal with this article, since H. P. received a proper reply from comrade Kurt Landau, who dealt with the question as behooves a Marxist.

The editor of the *Fahne des Kommunismus* printed the article as a discussion article, with a note that he is not in solidarity with the author. It is completely beyond comprehension how it is possible to open a discussion on so elementary a question for every revolutionary, particularly at a time when we need political action. Matters became even worse when the editor of that paper published Landau's contribution also as a "discussion article." The article of H. P. expresses the prejudices of vulgar democracy combined with those of anarchism. Landau's article formulates the Marxist standpoint. And what about the viewpoint of the editor.

Something incomparably worse occurred in one of the numerous groups of the French Opposition. No. 35 of *Contre le Courant* (dated July 28, 1929), devotes an editorial to the Soviet-Chinese conflict which is a sorry mess of errors from beginning to end, partly of social democratic, partly of ultra-Left hue. The article begins with the statement that the adventurist policy of the Soviet bureaucracy is responsible for the conflict, in other words, the paper assumes the role of Chiang Kai-Shek's defense attorney. The article puts the policy of the Soviets towards the Chinese Eastern Railway in the category of a capitalist, imperialist policy, which resorts to the support of the imperialist powers.

"The Communist Opposition," the article states, "cannot aid Stalin's war, which is not a defensive war of the proletariat but a semi-colonial war." Elsewhere it says: "The Opposition must have the courage to tell the working class that it is not falling into line with Stalinist bureaucrats, is not for their adventurist war." This phrase is emphasized in the original, and not by accident: it expresses the whole essence of the article and thereby puts the author into implacable opposition to the whole of the Communist Left.

In what sense is the Stalinist bureaucracy respon-

sible for the present conflict? In this sense and no other: that it helped Chiang Kai-Shek by its previous policy to destroy the revolution of the Chinese workers and peasants. I spoke of this in an article directed against Radek and company: "Chiang Kai-Shek's provocation is the reward of Stalin's assistance in crushing the Chinese revolution. I say it now, and I have repeated it a hundred times, that as soon as Chiang Kai-Shek will be seated securely in the saddle to which he will be aided by Stalin, the former will on the first occasion kick his assistant in the face with his stirrup. This is precisely what happened."

Chiang Kai-Shek's provocation was preceded by his crushing of the Chinese revolution. We behold here an adventure of the Bonapartist military power headed by Chiang Kai-Shek. This provocation is at the root of the Soviet-Chinese conflict.

According to the author of the article quoted, the principal cause of the conflict is the imperialist "claim" of the Soviet republic on the Chinese Eastern line. Hands Off China! shout the involuntary defenders of Chiang Kai-Shek, repeating not only the slogans but also the basic arguments of the social democrats. Heretofore we believed that only the capitalist bourgeoisie as a class could be the representatives of an imperialist policy. Is there anything to indicate the contrary? Or has such a class taken over power in the U. S. S. R.? Since when? We are fighting against the Centrism of the Stalinist bureaucracy (and remember: Centrism is a movement within the working class itself), because Centrism policies may help the bourgeoisie to gain power, first the petty and middle bourgeoisie, and eventually—finance capital. Herein lies the historical danger, although this is a process that is by no means at the point of completion.

In the same issue of *Contre le Courant*, the so-called draft of a platform is published. In this we read among other things: "We cannot say that the Thermidor has already come." This shows that the continual repetition of the general formulae of the Opposition is far from being equivalent to a political understanding of those formulae. If we cannot say that the Thermidor is an accomplished fact, neither can we say that Soviet policy has become a capitalist, or imperialist, policy. Centrism is a zig-zag between the proletariat and the petty-bourgeoisie. To identify Centrism with big capital means to understand nothing at all, and thereby support finance capital not only against the proletariat, but also against the petty bourgeoisie.

The theoretical wisdom of the ultra-Leftists in Berlin and in Paris simmers down to a few democratic abstractions, which have a geographical but not a socialist basis. The Chinese Eastern Railway runs through Manchuria, which belongs to China. China has a right to self-determination, therefore, the claim of Soviet Russia to this line is imperialism. They should be turned over. To whom? To Chiang Kai-Shek? Or to the son of Chang Tso-Lin?

In the course of the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations von Kuehlmann demanded an independent Latvia and Estonia, referring to the fact that the Landtags established there with the aid of Germany had instructed him to demand a separation. We refused to sanction this, and we were denounced by the entire official press of Germany as imperialists.

Let us assume that in the Caucasus there is an outbreak of a counter-revolution which, with the help of—say—England, achieves victory. Let us also assume that the workers of Baku, with the help of the Soviet Union, succeed in keeping the whole district of Baku in their power. It goes without saying that the Transcaucasian counter-revolution would then claim this district of Baku. It is perfectly clear that the Soviet Republic would not consent to this. Is it not also clear that in such a case the enemy would accuse the Soviets of imperialism?

Had the revolution of the Chinese workers and peasants been victorious, there would not be any difficulty whatsoever now with regard to the Chinese Eastern lines. These lines would have been turned over to the hands of the victorious Chinese people. But the fact of the matter is that the Chinese people were defeated by the ruling Chinese bourgeoisie, and with the aid of foreign imperialism. To turn over the lines to the hand of Chiang Kai-Shek under such conditions would mean to abet the Chinese Bonapartist counter-revolution against the Chinese people. This alone settles the whole issue. There is still another consideration of equal weight. Chiang Kai-Shek never could get those lines by virtue of his own financial political means—let alone keep them! It is by no means an accident that he tolerates the actual independence of Manchuria existing under a Japanese protectorate. The railway lines transferred to Chiang Kai-Shek would only become a security for the foreign loans which he received. They would go over into the hands of the real imperialists and would become their most important economic and strategic line in the Far East—against a potential Chinese revolution and against the Soviet republic. We are well aware that the imperialists understand perfectly how to utilize the slogan of self-determination for their own dirty deals. But I do not believe that Marxists are under any obligations to help them put it over.

The point of departure for the ultra-Lefts is the fact that it was greedy and thievish czarist imperialism which once took the Chinese Eastern lines from the Chinese people. This is a fact that cannot be argued. Yet, they forget to point out that the same imperialism had forced itself upon the Russian people. Yes,

those lines were constructed for the purpose of robbing the Chinese workers and peasants. But they were also constructed by the exploitation and robbery of the Russian workers and peasants. After this the October revolution took place. Did this alter the mutual relations of these peoples? On the foundation of the revolution, after a period of reaction, the state structure was rebuilt. Did Russia now return to the starting point? Can we now imagine, from a historical viewpoint—regardless of Stalin and Molotov, regardless of the exile of the Opposition, etc., etc.—can we imagine an ownership of the Chinese Eastern lines that would be more beneficial from the point of view of the international proletariat and the Chinese revolution, than that of the Soviet Union? This is how we ought to put the question.

All the White Guard emigres look upon this question not from a nationalist or a geographical viewpoint, but from a class angle. Regardless of internal dissension, the leading groups of the Russian emigres are in accord on the point that the internationalization of the Chinese Eastern, i. e., its transference to the hands of world imperialism, would be the advantage of the "coming", that is, of Bourgeois Russia, more advantageous than to leave it in the possession of the Soviet state. By the same token, we can say that to leave it in the hands of the Soviet power would be more advantageous to an independent China than to turn it over to any of the present claimants.

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Does this signify that the management of the lines is perfect? No! Indeed not. The remnants of czarist imperialism still have some strength there. All the zig-zags of internal policy are undoubtedly also reflected in the apparatus of the lines. The tasks of the Opposition extend also over these questions.

I would like to refer here to my personal experience in this matter. More than once did I have to fight for an improvement in the management of the Chinese railways. The last time I worked on this question was in a special committee of which I was chairman in March 1926. The members of this committee were Voroschilov, Dzerzhinsky and Tchitcherin. In full agreement with the Chinese revolutionaries, not only the Communists but the representatives of the at that time functioning Kuo Min Tang, the committee deemed it absolutely necessary:

"To retain the actual management of the railway in the hands of the Soviet power as the only means of safeguarding the lines from seizure by the imperialists in the next period." "The next period" meant—until the victory of the Chinese revolution. With regard to the regime in the interim, the resolution adopted on the question had this to say:

"It is absolutely necessary to adopt broad measures of a cultural-political character with regard to the *Chinafication* of the railroad.

"a) The management shall be conducted both in the Chinese and Russian languages;

"b) A Chinese school for railroad workers shall be established combining technical and political education;

"c) At appropriate points on the railway lines, educational institutions shall be established for the benefit of the Chinese workers and the population in the vicinity."

With regard to the policy of the Russian representatives towards China, the resolution said:

"There can be no doubt that with regard to China, the representatives of the various departments were guilty of impermissible activities that bore the character of an imperialist attitude which compromised the Soviet Power and suggested the idea of imperialism.

"The responsible organs and personnel of the railway must be impressed with the necessity of such a policy, and the importance even of the external forms of such a policy, towards China, as shall preclude the slightest shadow of imperialist conceptions. In every department a line shall be followed which will be based on the highest consideration for an understanding of the rights of China, on the recognition and emphasis of its sovereignty, etc. In each case where a violation of such policy shall occur, irrespective of how great or small such a violation may be, the guilty shall be punished and care taken that the proceedings be brought to the attention of Chinese public opinion."

In addition to this I must point to the fact that the Chinese owners of the railway, Chiang Kai-Shek included, put against the management of the railway, not the Chinese, but mainly the White Guardist apparatus that is on the payroll of the imperialists of the world. The White Guards employed in the police and military squads of the Chinese railway have frequently committed acts of violence against the railway workers. Regarding this, the resolution passed by the committee of that time, said the following:

"... It is absolutely necessary to investigate every future case in which Chinese military, police, or Russian White Guards commit violence on Russian workers and officials of the railway, and every case in which conflicts occurred between Russians and Chinese for nationalist reasons. Ways and means must be found so that the personal and national feelings of these Russian workers shall be dealt with in such a manner that conflicts of this kind shall not kindle chauvinist instincts in either Party (Russian or Chinese); on the contrary, they shall be used as the occasion for political education. Special conciliation committees, or courts, shall be established in unions, into which members of both nationalities shall enter and act upon the basis of equal rights. They shall be guided by serious-minded Communists who are fully aware of