A Strategy of Action and Not of Speculation: Letter to Beijing Friends. What are, at Present, the Chief Elements of the Political Situation in China?

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The two most important revolutionary problems, the national problem and the agrarian problem, have again become aggravated. The pace of the peasant war, slow and crawling but generally victorious, is evidence that the dictatorship of the Guomindang has proved incapable of satisfying the countryside or of intimidating it further. The Japanese intervention in Shanghai and the effective annexation of Manchuria have placed in relief the military bankruptcy of Guomindang dictatorship. The crisis of power which, at bottom, has not stopped for a single moment during these last years had to grow fatally worse. The struggle between the militarist cliques is destroying what remains of the unity of the country.

If the peasant war has radicalised the intellectuals who have connections in the countryside, the Japanese intervention, on the contrary, gave a political stimulation to the petty bourgeoisie of the cities. This has only again aggravated the crises of power. There is not a single section of the bourgeoisie called ‘Nationalists’ which does not tend to arrive at the conclusion that the Guomindang régime devours much and gives little. To demand an end of the period of ‘education’ of the Guomindang is to demand that the military dictatorship give way to parliamentarism.

The Left Opposition press has sometimes labelled as fascist the régime of Chiang Kai-shek. This definition was formed from the fact that in China as in Italy, the military-police power is concentrated in the hands of one bourgeois party alone to the exclusion of all other parties and, notably, of the workers’ organisations. But after the experience of the last years, an experience complicated by the confusion the Stalinists brought to the question of fascism, it would not be very correct, nevertheless, to identify the dictatorship of the
Guomindang with fascism. Hitler, as in his time Mussolini, supports himself, before all, on the counter-revolutionary petty bourgeoisie; there is the essence of fascism. The Guomindang has not this point of support. Thus in Germany the peasants march behind Hitler and by this fact indirectly support Von Papen; in China the peasants carry on the raging struggle against Chiang Kai-shek.

The régime of the Guomindang contains more of Bonapartist traits than of fascism: Not possessing a social base, no matter how small, the Guomindang, is half between the pressure of the imperialists and compradors on the one hand, and the revolutionary movement on the other. But Bonapartism can pretend to stability only when the land hunger of the peasants is satisfied. This is not true in the case of China. Hence the impotence of the military dictatorship which maintains itself thanks only to the dispersion of its enemies. But under their growing attack even this begins to be unhinged.

It is the proletariat which in the revolution of 1925–7 morally and physically suffered the most. That is why at the present time it is the workers who are in the rear of the other classes and in fact not only of the petty bourgeoisie, beginning with the students, but also, in a certain sense, of the peasants. On the other hand it is just this which proves that the third Chinese revolution not only will not win but will not even be produced as long as the working class has not again entered into the lists.

The slogans of the revolutionary democracy correspond in the best possible way to the political pre-revolutionary situation in China.

That the peasants, whatever their banner, fight for the aims of agrarian petty bourgeois democracy is what, for a Marxist, does not have to be demonstrated. The slogan of independence of China, raised to a white heat by the Japanese intervention, is a slogan of the national democracy. The powerlessness of the military dictatorship and the partition of the country among the militarist dictatorship and the partition of the country among the militarist cliques put on the end of the day the slogan of political democracy.

The students cry: ‘Down with the Guomindang government’. The groups of workers’ vanguard support this slogan. The ‘national’ bourgeoisie demands they go on to a constitutional régime. The peasants revolt against the dearth of land, the yoke of the militarists, government officials, and usurious loans. Under these circumstances the party of the proletariat cannot favour any other political central slogan than that of the NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (Constituent).

Does this mean, it will be asked, that we demand from the present government the convocation of the National Assembly or that we should strive to convoke it ourselves? This way of posing the question, at least at the present stage, is too formalistic. For a certain number of years, the Russian