Excerpts from Letters from China Written or Copied to Trotsky (1934)

Leon Trotsky

Source: A manuscript in the editor’s possession

1 Letter from Comrade Frank Glass, 30 August 1934

The organisation was unable to maintain *China Forum*. Chen Duxiu, who is a loyal and courageous comrade, but one who has been unable to complete the break from his Stalinist formation and who has no capacity to play a leading role, has written a letter to the IS [International Secretariat] on the Soviet state and the relation of the Bolshevik-Leninists to it. Niel Sih has taken a position against ‘Chen Duxiu-ism’. The Nanjing government’s dependence on Japan continues to become more obvious.

2 Letter from H. R. Isaacs to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCP) concerning *China Forum*

The Communist Party has obliged the journal, which had not only been maintained under the most difficult conditions from January 1932 to January 1934 but also considerably expanded – there were Readers’ Circles of *China Forum* in 5 provinces – to cease publication. Aside from slight financial support the CCP never did anything for the journal and has forced it to stop publication because internal party considerations are more important to it than the fight for the revolution and against imperialism. The methods of the CCP are characterised by the fact that propaganda and truth are counterposed concepts for it. It falsifies facts in order to manufacture great successes, although in fact the movement has been forced onto the defensive and is still poorly organised, despite the heroism and endurance of the communist minded workers. The mass movement of 1925–7 has disintegrated due to the fault of the leaders of the CCP. One example: in 1926 there were 257 strikes in greater Shanghai, in 1932 there were only 32, in which only a minimal number of workers participated – and they were only defensive strikes against wage reductions, and so on. The January 1932 massacre by the Japanese of tens of thousands of workers in the International Settlement in Shanghai did not give rise to any strikes that
could disrupt normal life in the Settlement. It is false that nothing could have been done to oppose the white terror and the reactionary Guomindang; but to do anything would have required the well-planned education and organisation of the masses. Isolated peasant uprisings and the heroic deeds of the red army in Jiangxi won't bring down the Guomindang. It is also wrong to withdraw the best working class elements from their factories to participate in the movement in the red areas: in this way the most active forces are lost to the cities. The tactics of the party have not taken the real necessities into account. So it turns out that the oppression of the working masses has not developed into a struggle against the imperialists: the leaders are lacking. This is the same wrong policy of the communists as in other countries. For the sake of our common goals the Forum never took up these questions. In only one case did the journal passively resist the instructions of the CCP: when Chen Duxiu was sentenced to thirteen years in jail, we were told not to write about how he developed from a leader of the CCP in 1927 to a leader of the left opposition in 1933. We were told to make disparaging comments to the effect that the Guomindang persecuted even the leader of the left opposition. Of course we didn't do that. When Isaacs returned from Fujian in December 1933, the CCP demanded that he write that the left opposition was linked to the Fuzhou régime, even though from his own personal experience he knew the opposite to be true. Of course he refused, but, for the sake of peace with the CCP, he passed the question over in silence. Despite this conciliatory attitude, which went as far as humanly possible, Isaacs was given an ultimatum in January 1934: the Forum had to refrain from any criticism whatever of communist policies in China, Germany, USSR, and so on, and instead attack 'counter-revolutionary' Trotskyism. In the discussions Isaacs was told: ‘A certain degree of exaggeration is necessary for propaganda purposes, but we know the real facts and base our policy on these alone, not on the exaggerations’. Isaacs offered to publish all official communications of the CP, reserving the possibility of commenting on or criticising them. This was rejected. Since Isaacs could not maintain the Forum out of his own pocket, but under these circumstances also didn't want to transfer it to the CCP, he had to cease publication. But he will continue the true and honourable revolutionary struggle.

Beijing, 20 May 1934.

3 Letter from Frank Glass to the International Secretariat

The Chinese Left Opposition is stagnating. That can be explained by the general situation, but above all by its own deficiencies. Concrete political perspectives