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AN OPEN LETTER TO MR. HENRY LUCE

Dear Mr. Luce:

A few days ago, one of your staff members of LIFE wired me to send what photographs of the Chinese Communist Armies that I have to illustrate a forthcoming article on the Chinese Communists.

For a brief moment I wondered if your publications were being driven into the unfortunate position of reporting the truth about the Chinese Communist-led armies, or if, instead, you were not merely going to concoct articles such as appeared in your TIME article on "China" on Nov. 13th, or the editorial in LIFE about the same time. I was willing to send photographs and other material if your forthcoming article were based on fact instead of upon the fabricated dope which the Chinese secret political police in Chungking and New York are putting out. Consequently, I telephoned your staff member who had wired me, but could learn nothing of the nature of the article which my photographs were to illustrate.

For another brief moment I was tempted to follow an opportunist line of reasoning: i.e., that if I could get even one picture with a truthful caption, in LIFE, it would be worth while. Close upon the heels of this thought came a little dog of an idea:

"After all, I could earn a dime--and I need a dime."

This little dog, its tongue hanging out and its tail waving in the air, followed me to my studio to watch me claw through photographs and other ~~xxx~~ material from the Communist-led armies with which I spent two years.

As I turned over photographs, my studio became peopled with the voices of men with whom I had lived and worked and fought. There was one

of a New 4th Army commander, a former art student in Hankow, who commanded a platoon of guerrillas that took me through a blockade system of the Japanese into a No-man's land north of Hankow where we tried to be among the quick rather than the dead. Before we left, this young commander spoke to his platoon, saying:

"We are taking an American friend of China through the enemy lines. . . our wounded are her children. . . should we be attacked, we must die fighting rather than allow her to be wounded or taken captive. . ."

The chins of the guerrilla soldiers lifted and their eyes stared at something far away which I could not see--perhaps it was the future. I recall the thought that dominated my mind at that moment: to remain as faithful to them as they were to me.

Turning to other photographs, I found many of men who have since been killed in action by the Japanese. Others were of battlefields, snow-clad and dreary, ~~and~~ others of students singing, others of children, and some of the wounded whom I cared for as best I could.

There were others of nationalist divisions with which I also spent some two years, and ^{of} one a nationalist commander who killed himself rather than be taken captive by the enemy. His voice also filled my studio, saying again and again: "Tell your countrymen that we will fight to the last drop of our blood."

I then recalled how I tried to carry out this man's wish in my last book, Battle Hymn of China, which your TIME magazine refused ~~to~~ even ^{to} mention because a Chinese woman reactionary on your staff did not wish anything truthful said about the Chinese Communist-led guerrillas. Three different men reviewed my book for TIME, but all were rejected. I would dismiss this as of no importance had the book been only about myself. It was not. It was about the Chinese armies: both Communist and nationalist.

Next, I turned ~~again~~ to an article on "China" in the Nov. 15th issue of TIME, and to your editorial in LIFE shortly after. Thereupon the little dog who had been panting and thumping his tail in the hopes of earning a dime, was sprawled out on the floor, his eyes half-closed, and a most discouraged expression on his ugly face. Despite him, I re-read these two Epistles of lace to the Americans, then went to the telephone and sent a telegram to your staff member stating that I refused to allow LIFE to use, or even to view, my photographs of the Chinese Communists. In it I stated that I would write my reasons.

The following are my reasons:

On May 1st you published a true and courageous article on China by Theodore White, after which Dr. Sun Fo, President of the Legislative Yuan of the Chinese Government, wired you that the report was factually true and that Chinese liberals do not object to friendly American criticism. Since then I sometimes thought of sending you letters from Chinese friends in China and the United States, saying that American democrats are playing a great historical role in the defence of Chinese democratic forces. ~~in China~~ China, these letters often state, will never forget this, and will be forever grateful to us.

After May, however, many high Chinese officials and Kuomintang agents came to this country and began a campaign against American friends of Chinese democracy. They began to feed a regular "Kuomintang line" of propaganda to American reactionaries who have been willing to "front" ~~xxxxxx~~ for them. This activity has been accompanied by secret efforts ~~to induce American and Chinese~~ to have ^{Americans} in many institutions of the country, discharged because they have criticized Kuomintang reaction. This "Kuomintang Party line" has charged that Americans have been interfering in Chinese affairs by trying to force the Chungking Government to lift the blockade against the Chinese Communist-led Sth Route and New

4th Armies and to "turn the Chinese Government over to the Communists". Your TIME article of the 18th ^{echoed} ~~stated~~ this "line". ~~Stunningly~~. The material for it was furnished by Mrs. X. X. Sung, a Chinese woman on your staff who has not been in China for many years and who has never been within ten thousand miles of the Communist-led armies--or of any Chinese Army for that. One of your American editors ~~also~~ tidied this material into your TIME article, while you came along in your LIFE editorial demanding that we put no strings on war material furnished to the Kuomintang Government.

The Chinese upon whom you have depended for your information--if such it may be called--talk~~ed~~ of our "interference in Chinese affairs", though by supporting--as we have since 1927--the Kuomintang dictatorship we have interfered in Chinese affairs to the never-ending detriment of the Chinese people. Your Chinese informers do not really object to American interference in Chinese affairs. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ^{that} They welcome ~~our~~ interference ~~which~~ keeps them in power, and they see nothing wrong with American war materials, made by the labor of American workers, being diverted to a potential civil war against the Chinese Communist-led armies. They, like your publications, use the name of "China", though the elements who pretend to represent "China"--according to Dr. Sun Fo--represent less than 1% of the Chinese people, and ^{constitute} ~~constitute~~ a "dictatorship and a tyranny" that had forgotten the very meaning and methods of democracy.

In your Nov. 18th TIME article, you distorted even the facts that led to General Joseph Stilwell's recall. For instance:

"General Stilwell had long believed that China's war effort would be mightily reinforced by bringing the Chinese Communist armies into the war against Japan. . ."

Here the American people are fed the "Kuomintang line", ~~stating~~ inferring that the Chinese Communist armies have not been and are not

fighting the Japanese. Your publications, however, needed only to read the monitored Japanese radio dispatches for years, ~~in~~ which they boasted year on end of constant fighting in which they had "annihilated" the Communist armies. How the Japanese stand toward the Communists ~~and~~ ~~is~~ ~~clearly~~ ~~expressed~~ ~~by~~ ~~the~~ ~~quiescing~~ ~~flag~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ puppet Nanking Government, across which these words are written: "Chinese people's anti-Communist Government".

Take this sentence from your TIME article:

"Their (the Communist) infiltration of these areas (north China) has been achieved by driving out not Japs, but Chungking's guerrillas and entire administration."

Not only I, Mr. Luce, but many other Americans have seen the 8th Route Army in action. Within the first three or four months of the war, the Japanese had cleared most of north China of Chinese nationalist armies, and of administrators ^{who} fled with the armies--or remained to work as Japanese puppets. It was under the command of General Wei Li-hwang, the commander of the Shansi front, that the first three divisions of ^{the} 8th Route Army infiltrated into ^{Japanese-} ~~north China~~ ~~occupied~~ territory and began to recapture them from the enemy. To take the place of old officials, whose administration had been notoriously corrupt, the Communist-led armies organized and armed the people, introduced universal suffrage, the secret ballot, and held people's elections in which ^{-- and women --} men ran for office regardless of party or class. Women were liberated, ~~and~~ given suffrage rights. The Chungking Government later tried to send back its own old ~~appointed~~ appointed officials, ^{but} the people rejected them.

Many foreigners have seen this development, ~~among~~ among them Col. Evans F. Carlson of the U.S.M.C., and G. Martell Hall, former director of the National City Bank of Peiping who escaped to the 8th Route and lived with them for eight months. In fact, one week before TIME article appeared, an American of authority, returned from the 8th

Route Army, talked with you for an hour and gave you first-hand impressions of our correspondents, military experts, and aviators. Despite this material, you allowed that TIME article to appear.

Your ~~TIME~~ article also stated that "Chungking's military intelligence" has captured many Communist high command directives, one being a plan to capture north Kiangsu Province which, you stated, is a "Chungking area".

Now, the Japanese captured Haichow, strategic center of north Kiangsu in June, 1938, and established their power in strategic cities and along all lines of communication. I was with the New 4th Army, which operated along the lower reaches of the Yangtze, in eastern Anhwei and north Kiangsu Provinces, for eight months. There was one small Government Division of troops in north Kiangsu, commanded by General Li Chang-kiang. This General was able to exist because he cooperated with the Japanese via the puppet troops of Wang Ching-wei, the Chinese quisling in Nanking. Together with the Japanese and the puppets, he ~~often~~ fought the New 4th Army. But in early 1940 this ~~Government~~ General went over to the Japanese hook, line, and sinker. When American correspondents asked about this in Chungking, a Government spokesman dared reply that General Li acted from "patriotic motives", and would later return to the fold. He has not done so. Some thirty other Government officers followed his "patriotic" example.

Another paragraph in your TIME article stated:

"Stripped to the bare facts, that situation was that Chungking, a dictatorship ruling high-handedly in order to safeguard the last vestiges of democratic principles in China, was engaged in an undeclared civil war with Yen-an, a dictatorship whose purpose was the spread of totalitarian Communism in China."

This is a new wrinkle in Kuomintang propaganda. Americans who have been with the Communist-led armies know the facts which you try to deny. In his book, ~~xxxxxxx~~ China Looks Forward, Dr. Sun Fo exposed

the totalitarian regime of the Kuomintang as an imitation of Fascism, operating with secret political police systems, and founded on feudal landlord tyranny and corruption. His book was a cry that every American democrat should have heard, ^{and whom informed} ~~throughout~~ ~~most~~ Americans have for years tried to awaken ~~some people~~. More recently, Dr. Sun spoke in Chungking, declaring that "certain people" in China not only regard democracy as a "new-fangled foreign idea", but are afraid of it". These "certain people" include ^d the Party boss, Chen Li-fu, General Ho Ying-ching, the chief-of-staff, and, whether you wish to recognize it or not, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. Their fear of democracy accounts for their blockade of the Communist-led armies.

Your TIME article quoted alleged articles, written by one alleged Wang Shih-wei, and published in the Emancipation Daily of Yen-an, which, your article stated, were "smuggled" out of Yen-an.

The Emancipation Daily is published in thousands of copies and circulated over all north China. Communists themselves smuggle it down into Chungking and into the United States. I have copies of this newspaper, but have never seen these articles, so that I am forced to believe them fabricated by the Chinese Gestapo in Chungking or in New York.

However, for the past three years, the Emancipation Daily has carried on a campaign against "bureaucracy, dogmatism and sectarianism" within the ranks of the Communist Party and of the north China administration. The Communists of China have never claimed infallibility. Instead, they expose weaknesses and faults and try to eradicate them. Would that the Kuomintang had been so courageous all these years! Would that your own publications, Mr. Luce, were so courageous and honest!

Any statement that the Chinese Communists "ignore the people's welfare" and neglect the sick "who cannot obtain a mouthful of soup", is a deliberate lie. I worked with the medical services of both the 8th

Route and New 4th Armies and, despite their inadequate medical supplies and ~~qualified~~ personnel, they were superior to any nationalist army ⁱⁿ China. The sick and wounded were given every possible care and received three meals a day, and even special diets. They were the only armies that even knew what special diets were. Their medical services were also at the disposal of the civilian population, totally without charge. In the one year, 1939 alone, two rear hospitals of the New 4th Army where I worked, cared for 30,000 civilians, ~~apart~~ ^{Army} apart from the sick and wounded.

True, there were places and times, and still are, when these armies never had enough to eat. They had only two meals a day, at ten and at four--but this was the universal practice of all the nationalist armies also. In the Communist armies, officers and men shared the same food. True, they needed better and more, ~~but~~ but ~~they~~ couldn't get it. But it was bad taste, to say the least, to complain. Their extensive educational work, the best of all armies of China, taught ^{their soldiers} the nature of the war, the reasons and necessity for it, and also the state of the world. Unlike our own troops when the war began, they knew ~~the~~ the methods and ideology of Fascism. Their knowledge provided them with what our John Brown called "an armor against affliction".

I once tried to adopt a thin little war-orphan from the New 4th Army, offered to send him to a school near Chungking and later bring him with me to America where he could eat all he needed. The child milled over this for one whole night, and I suspect a little dog, ^{of personal interest} its tongue hanging out, tormented him. Finally he refused, saying I could adopt him "after the final victory" because "now all men are needed at the front".

WA The voices of such children, and of half a million men, fill my studio now. I've attended their dying and helped bury ^{their dead.} ~~them~~

They died as they had lived and fought--without fear or regret. They, together with a few of the most advanced nationalist armies, alone knew fully the meaning of this ~~xxx~~ war and the role which they were ~~xxx~~ called upon to play in Chinese and world history. From the first day of the war until the present, they declared that they were fighting not only for Chinese, ~~xxxxxxx~~ but for world democracy. Their conception of democracy is broader than ~~xxx~~ the interpretation ^{given} ~~to~~ it by the moneyed interests of their own country or ours. They thought in terms of the entire Chinese people rather than of a tiny minority of the rich and privileged. Can you, able to read our own Declaration of Independence and our Bill of Rights, claim that they are wrong?

The regime which TIME, LIFE and FORTUNE has chosen to champion, is crumbling. Not until the Japanese were actually knocking on ^{its} ~~their~~ front door has this regime been willing to ~~listen~~ ~~now~~ yield a ^{single} ~~step~~ to the Chinese democratic forces--which include the Communists. It ^{scorned} ~~xxxxxx~~ even the democrats within its own ranks. It sent its agents to the United States to lie to and deceive the American public, and ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ you opened your publications to them.

That America is in part responsible for the whole Chinese debacle goes without saying. Americans who for years wrote the truth about China were defamed as Reds, idealists, visionaries and what not. I am one of those called "partisan" because I would not sit on the fence and pretend that Fate could protect us, or the regime which we sponsored in China, from the consequences of our actions toward it or toward Japanese imperialism.

I am not rejoicing that the Chinese Government is falling. It should have fallen years ago to the democratic forces of China.

It would have, had our moneyed interests not supported it in power. Now the cry goes up that the Chinese Communists will dominate all China and fight the war, while American influence will wane. Let us thank God that some Chinese force remains intact to fight on, in cooperation with us. American democrats will thank God that this new China, rising in the ashes of the old, will not sell their country to American and British industrialists and financiers.

Within the ranks of the Chinese nationalist armies are hundreds of thousands of honest, ~~and~~ democratic patriots. It is they who must pay for the sins of the Kuomintang regime, and those who escape death in this debacle will find ways of uniting with other men like themselves, including the ~~Chinese~~ Communist armies, to continue the war and to build a democratic Government. That Government will not be "totalitarian Communism" as your TIME article stated, for that is not and never has been the program or purpose of the Chinese Communists. If we try to destroy this Government, ~~this new China~~ in order that China may become a puppet state as Greece and Italy are British puppets, we may cause decades of suffering and bloodshed, but we will merely end by becoming the most hated of imperialisms.

Finishing this long letter in reply to your short telegram but in reality in reply to your long and false articles on the Chinese situation, I looking about to find that little dog that hoped to earn a dime. He had vanished for, being a dog, he was a realist and perhaps went elsewhere. Perhaps he realized that I had decided to remain true to the dead of China--and above all to the living.

Very truly yours,

(Agnes Smedley)