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IS DEMOCRATIC CRITICISM OF CHINA GOOD FOR THE WAR?

As is well known, certain groups in the Chinese Government and the Kuomintang have reacted most violently to articles dealing frankly with the objective situation in China, and criticizing their own record directly or by implication, that have appeared recently in America and elsewhere. Government spokesmen in Chungking took official cognizance of each one of these articles before they became too numerous. Ranking Ministers entered into polemics with their writers. The official and inspired press made every effort, by quotations out of context and misleading paraphrases, to prove to the Chinese people that factual criticism of the party and government was actually an ignorant and arrogant foreign attack on China as a whole. Even such tried friends of China, and her government, as Pearl Buck did not escape this bitter and indiscriminate condemnation.

The Kuomintang not only beat off the foreign "attacks" with much ire but initiated an all-front propaganda counter-offensive of its own. The Generalissimo withdrew his anti-democratic and anti-western book "China's Destiny" (written by his quasi-fascist ghost writer Tao Hsi-sheng who spent two years as a lieutenant of the quisling Wang Ching-wei before turning his coat a second time) from public sale in Chungking but made a whole series of statements promising the establishment of civil liberties and constitutional rule. The Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang promised the country a new deal one year after the war. The bitterly reactionary Dr. Chang Tao-fan, a member of the disreputable "CC clique" who had been Minister of Information since 1942, was replaced by the good-natured intellectual Liang Han-chao, who turned a new face of understanding and affability to the foreign press. Minister Liang initiated the custom of beginning each ministerial press conference with a long sermon on how well-disposed newspapermen should view events in China. He has gone to great lengths to anticipate questions and answer them in a favorable light. This was the case in regard to his categorical statement, on behalf of the government, that there would be no civil war in China, a statement that for some strange reason never appeared in the Chinese press at all.

The new propaganda policy was unfortunately not a true representation of the actual processes at work in China. Preparations for civil war not only continued but were intensified, and at the present moment officially and privately owned trucks are being commandeered all over Chungking to carry urgent orders of munitions and supplies not to the anti-Japanese front in Hunan, where battles of some importance are going on, but to the northwestern garrisons. Government spokesmen at a press conference were compelled to admit that the much heralded constitutional convention which the Kuomintang and the Generalissimo had promised would be composed of more than 900 delegates "elect" in 1936 at a period when civil war rent China and appeasement of Japan was the official policy -- and only 250 to be elected in future. Asked whether any of the 900 original delegates belonged to parties or groups other than the Kuomintang, the government's mouthpiece replied that "it was possible, but he did not know offhand". And no one, least of all the spokesman, could explain to a Chungking conference room full of people who had new evidences of increasing secret police activity every day, just how democratic procedures could be promoted or prepared under these conditions.

✓ We now come to another question. How did non-official Chinese, the democratic and intellectual elements, react to these criticisms from abroad. Are there large groups in China which can be reached by, and react to, foreign expressions of concern for Chinese democracy?

✓ ✓ The answer is that despite the fact that practically the only American newspapers and magazines to reach China are those brought in by chance travelers, these articles have been both read and appreciated. Moreover, liberal minded Chinese have expressed their opinion of them by making typed and mimeographed copies and literally dozens of anonymous translations which are passed from hand to hand. Recently secretly printed collections, in pamphlet form, have also appeared. In considering this fact it must be remembered that each of the many individuals and groups who have gone to the trouble of duplicating and circulating this material would be exposed to penalties if ~~discovered~~ exposed.

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In addition to widespread reproduction, the enthusiastic comment of readers who included not only political progressives and intellectuals but also many officials and some military officers has shown how much partisans of democracy in China value the realization of their country's needs by people abroad. One of the highest officials in China (in rank but not actual power) has presented a bound translation of recent critical articles to scores of his subordinates. And despite the fact that Hanson Baldwin's unjustified generalizations, such as his characterization of China as a "geographical expression", are generally and rightly resented, a Chinese military leader commanding more than fifty divisions of Central troops on a major front urged all his officers to read it and to consider just what actual conditions in the Chinese army could lead an observer of recognized caliber to come to such conclusions.

(I believe this general to be General Li Cheng-fen. - Agnes Smalley)
Chen Chen
A remark often heard from Chinese liberals is that the only trouble with honest, objective American evaluations of the situation here is that they have come too late.

Finally there is the question of why articles by private authors appearing many thousands of miles away have become a serious political factor in China?

✓ ✓ The answer is simple. Despite its outwardly chauvinistic trend, the present leaders of the Kuomintang and the government, by alienating their own people and holding down the development of China's own strength, have increased their own dependence on the United States to a degree unprecedented even in China's semi-colonial history. And one of the greatest assets of the government in persuading Americans that the Chinese cause is in good hands has been the reflected glory, in the eyes of American public opinion, of the heroic years of 1937-39, when the government was really more or less at one with the people in a truly progressive policy of anti-Japanese struggle. That this picture has faded in reality, and even in many respects been reversed, does not make the government any less determined that friends of China abroad should continue to believe it.

Self-respecting Chinese advocates of unity and democratic resistance do not hope that America will achieve their aims for them. Some groups belonging to this category are solidly based on the people, and others are trying to find their way to the people -- which is the real source of China's strength. But the intellectuals and others who think in this way, and there are many, cannot express themselves publicly in Chungking -- or in any other large city of "Free China", because of suppression and censorship. So it naturally encourages them greatly to know that Americans -- citizens of a country on which, for better or for worse, China's dependence is now very great-- do not accept the government at its own valuation. They are happy to know that in striving for greater freedom of expression and activity, for the things that China needs to fight now as effectively as when she began, they will not have to fight a deluded America as well but on the contrary have the American people as their friends.

Democratic Liberation
of China
non communist but
Democrats -
from Chungking ✓