

X - 78 - 67. New Statesman and Nation, January 4, 1944 - typewritten copy of review of Battle Hymn of China by Agnes Smedley.

COPY OF REVIEW OF BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA and THE VOICE OF CHINA

New Statesman and Nation dated 1.4.44

These two books should be read together. THE VOICE OF CHINA, an official publication, is a cold document, usefull reminding us, through the voices of the President of the Chinese Republic and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, of the policy they have pursued since December 7th, 1941, when Japan forced Britain and America to take China as an ally. Behind those impersonal phrases lies the suffering, the poverty, the bravery, and the fierce political struggle which are the daily realities of the Chinese scene. These are the themes of Miss Agnes Smedley's book, BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA.

Miss Smedley entered Manchuria in 1928. She worked with Ly Hsun and Mao Tun, two of the most famous modern writers; she describes their bitter grief in the days when young intellectuals were tortured and killed because they were suspected of "dangerous thoughts." From 1936 onwards she had the good journalistic fortune to be in the middle of every big news story. When Chiang Kai-shek was captured in Sian, she was there, and when she read the famous eight demands she knew that China had entered a new political phase in her history. She was right; this was the beginning of the united front which has been the basis of Chinese resistance. Later on when she spent some months in Yen-an, she heard Mao Tse-tung give a report to the Communist Party members in which he concluded that democracy was the most important condition of successful armed resistance to Japan.

That conclusion is just as true to-day, and although China's deterioration and her economic crises have helped to deepen the political struggle, the need for democratic rights has been recognised by some, at any rate, of China's leaders. One of the speeches in THE VOICE OF CHINA - made by the Generalissimo to the Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang last September - includes this important pronouncement: "My personal opinion is that after the institution of Constitutional Government, our Party should be on an equal footing with other Parties, and should enjoy equal treatment from the State under the principles of freedom of assembly, organisation, speech and publication in accordance with the law.

On the fulfilment of such a programme, the future of the democratic struggle in China will be focused. Meanwhile, the war goes on, and China suffers more privations, more starvation as a member of the United Nations than she did when she fought alone. Some idea of the depths which human endurance may plumb, can be gathered from Miss Smedley's terrible stories; and it must be remembered that the situation to-day is far, far worse. To the shortage of trained doctors and nurses, and the general backwardness of social hygiene throughout the country, we must now add the appalling shortage of drugs, the famine in vast areas, the inflation and in some cases the moral ~~disintegration~~

New Statesman & Nation continued

disintegration which leads to corruption. These are the "few selfish degenerates" as they are called in Chiang Kai-shek's book, and the Chungking Government would be strengthening its own position, as well as undermining current whispering campaigns directed against aid to China, if those who are guilty in high circles were removed.

Miss Smedley, wandering about, as few journalists have been able to do, reserves her bitterest comments for those officials who cheat the peasant and the soldier. In one of her most vivid stories, a soldier, angered by the sufferings of his companions who are the victims of such cheating, takes the situation into his own hands and shoots the company commander and the doctor. Then a group of young soldiers decided that if supplies were controlled by committees of convalescing soldiers, an honest distribution would be assured. Miss Smedley writes with great enthusiasm of the work of Dr. Robert Lim, Surgeon-General Loo Chih-liu who have built up the Army Medical Administration, and Dr. P.Z.King who has formed a network of free medical clinics throughout Free China. Their lack of equipment was brought home to Agnes Smedley when she subsequently returned to Hong Kong and found an ordinary pharmacy "stocked with far more medical supplies" than she had seen "in any Chinese army on the whole front." This was only one of the many things which made her bitter in the pre-war Hong Kong days of December, 1941. One Japanese naval officer remarked "that it would not be necessary to fight for Hong Kong, because it would merely fall into Japan's lap 'like a rotten fruit'." The British were spending tens of millions of pounds on the defences and on new military highways, but the Japanese knew every gun emplacement and ammunition dump. The blow fell on December 7, 1941, by which time Miss Smedley was back home. Since the fall of Burma, China's suffering has grown greater than ever before. To hunger and famine among civilians must now be added the swift deterioration of the condition of the Army, inflation on a scale comparable with that of the worst days in Germany. The responsibility for this crisis in Chinese affairs rests in part with the Allied Nations, especially Great Britain and the United States. Their leaders talk of China as an Ally and treat her worse than an embarrassing poor relation. They end Unequal Treaties and then their big business friends settle down to think of financing industries which will bring them a quick return and of developing markets which will provide a boom in the difficult days after the war. Meanwhile, every excuse is made for the failure to supply the people and the Army with drugs which are desperately needed; charity is a convenient alibi for those whose minds are rigidly fixed on the good old days when the Chinese coolie pulled them round in their rickshaws as docile as a mule, and much cheaper.

China is facing the most difficult crisis in modern times, but for the first time in her long history, her problems are interwoven with

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