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New York 18, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

As the battle for Central China nears a climax in the Hsueh-Pengpu area hysterical rumors and speculation pour out of the national capital. Contradictions and official denials make the news almost incomprehensible to the average reader, and Chinese distant from the centers of military and political activity must rely on guesswork to piece together a picture of what is happening to their government and their country in this national crisis.

One persistent rumor, persistently denied, claims that the Central Government is preparing to evacuate Nanking. Canton, Taiwan, Chungking, and Hengyang are mentioned as possible places of refuge for various branches of the government.

This rumor, and the obvious military threat to Nanking, have stimulated widespread discussion of what will happen if and when (most people now believe it is a question of when rather than if) Nanking falls to the Communists. Will the Central Government attempt to move South as an intact unit? Will it attempt to reorganize and continue resistance to the Communists from new geographical bases? If the answer to these questions is affirmative, what are its chances of success?

At present it appears that if the Nationalists decide to shift their capital and continue fighting the decision will be made at the last minute and the move will be a disorganized scramble for safety. I was in Canton last week and saw no evidence that careful preparations had been made or were under way to receive a large influx of government personnel. Reports of such preparations in other possible evacuation centers are conspicuously lacking in press dispatches. In Nanking, furthermore, Government spokesmen continue to deny that any move is under consideration. These facts do not necessarily indicate that the Central Government will not attempt to move. They do suggest, however, that if a move is made it may be disorderly and uncoordinated.

The possibility of continuing military action against the Communists from a new Nationalist capital will depend in part upon the success with which public support can be mobilized and a spirit of resistance revived. In short, the general morale of people South

of the Yangtze River will become a vital element in the political situation in China if Nanking falls.

I have recently completed a trip by train and car through the provinces of Kiangsu, Chekiang, Kiangsi, Hunan, and Kwangtung. Political demoralization in the areas I visited is almost universal, and morale is incredibly low. Almost no spirit of resistance against the Communists remains, and faith in the Central Government seems to have vanished. I talked with people of many sorts: businessmen, educators, rickshaw coolies, civil servants, technicians, merchants. All were psychologically prepared for a basic shift of political control and a change of regime.

This low morale stems from the difficulty of ordinary living, a longing for peace and stability, and a growing mistrust of the Central Government as well as from the ominous reports from fighting fronts. "This cant go on." "Any change will be for the better." Remarks such as these are accompanied by solemn head-shaking and dour expressions. The people I talked with face the future, and the prospect of a Communist-dominated government supplanting the present Nationalist regime, with emotions which mix resignation, relief, and apprehension in varying degrees.

The "mood of the people" is an intangible thing which cannot be described in neat formulas or measurable terms. In China the difficulty of defining the political mood is magnified by the scarcity of media of public expression. Whatever its validity elsewhere, the concept of "public opinion" is not generally applicable in China because the majority of the population is inarticulate. Furthermore, millions of people without access to reliable information have no clear-cut opinions about national political events. They react emotionally to stimuli which include grapevine rumors, incomplete news, distorted reports - and the local price of rice. They feel rather than understand political trends. The people I met between Shanghai and Canton feel that the time is ripe for a major political change in China. Even those who fear change seem to accept its inevitability with helpless resignation.

The literate, politically-conscious minority in Nationalist China try to obtain accurate information on current events but can seldom find it in newspapers or elsewhere. The Government's indirect censorship of news, whatever its motives, has discredited both the Press and the Government itself. "When Central News announces that a city has been 'saved'", a railway engineer said to me, "we suspect that it has been lost or is about to fall." Cynicism, based on bitter past experience, is widespread. Lack of information is equally widespread. "What is going on in North China?" a group of Changsha professors and doctors asked when I was there. They were eager to hear a first-hand report from someone who might have access to reliable information. They knew nothing of the Communist capture of Mukden which had taken place nine days previously.

Many Chinese don't believe anything their Government says now. When Generalissimo Chiang admits that it will take eight years to defeat the Communists, people remember irresponsible statements of a short while ago promising victory in six months. An increasing number of people feel that the Central Government has deceived and cheated them. The collapse of the recent economic reform program, more than anything else perhaps, has created public distrust of new government policies. Many people now regard the reforms as a clever fraud, a device whereby one kind of paper money was substituted for another as a means of gathering in the gold, silver, and foreign currency savings of the public. The number of people who are willing to make excuses for government mistakes and failures is decreasing.

Among government officials themselves old patterns of thinking and acting persist, and as the general situation deteriorates the public is less tolerant of them. Self-delusion, rationalization, and wishful thinking among officials and others closely allied to the Nationalist regime have often prevented them from attacking problems honestly and solving them efficiently. In the present gloomy political atmosphere, their wishful thinking is fast disappearing but self-delusion and rationalization continue in the face of disaster. One of the most characteristic manifestations of these thought patterns is the search for scapegoats and the refusal to accept blame for political failures or even to recognize failures.

"There are two main causes for the present economic chaos in China", a young government worker said to me in Nanchang, capital of Kiangsi Province. "One is President Truman's refusal to recognize the new Chinese currency.(?) The other is manipulation of the black market in large cities by Russian agents and traitors hired by them." This young man refused to believe that the Central Government's economic reform measures might have been poorly conceived and implemented. He supported his "facts" with unquestionable "proof". In a speech two days previously the most prominent Kuomintang leader in Kiangsi had explained the whole situation. Ordinary people who are not connected with the Nationalist Government, however, are much less gullible, and they are openly showing their disapproval of the lack of honesty and frankness on the part of officials and politicians.

Facts such as these help to explain the loss of faith in the Central Government. They also help to explain the increasing credibility of claims and reports favorable to the Communists. "The Communists treated the people well after they took Tsinan (capital of Shantung)", a businessman said to me. "In fact, conditions improved remarkably after they took over." A weary pilot, on the train between Hankow and Canton, described the low morale of the unit he had just left in North China. He contrasted it with Communist morale. "The Communists", he said in partial explanation, "take care of the families of their military men so that they don't have any personal worries." Statements such as these are made today by people who would have called them absurd propaganda a year ago.

I met very few people South of Nanking who would welcome the National Government with enthusiasm if it packs up and moves. The Government's rear is psychologically weak and vulnerable. If an evacuation southward is made, the Government will find itself in a region where people have already lost faith in the fight. It will encounter distrust. It may even encounter intense resentment and active opposition. With public morale at such low ebb, the job of mobilizing support and reviving a spirit of resistance against the Communists will be colossal - if it is possible at all.

Sincerely yours,

Doak Barnett

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