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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
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Dear Mr. Roger:

The Communists now possess a predominance of power in China, and they are setting up a "Peoples Government" to legalize and formalize their rule in the territory under the control of their People's Liberation Army. Local governments are being established step by step on a piecemeal basis, and two months ago the Communists issued an announcement which served notice to the Chinese public and to the world that the groundwork was being laid for an overall national government in Communist China. On June 20 in Peiping the People's Daily, official organ of the North China Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party, carried a prominent headline: "The Preparatory Committee of the New Political Consultative Conference is established in Peiping. It is preparing to convoke a New Political Consultative Conference and establish a Democratic Coalition Government." Prior to this announcement, the literate public in China had known of the Communists' intention to establish a government by means of a Political Consultative Conference, but no one outside of the inner circle of the Communists and their closest political allies knew of the steps being taken in that direction. Since the brief flurry of publicity in June, furthermore, the curtain has dropped again on the political stage in Communist territory.

At present secret high-level discussions are taking place in Peiping, and the New Political Consultative Conference is expected to convene in the near future. According to one prevalent rumor in Peiping, the Communists hope to have a new national government ready for formal inauguration on October 10, anniversary of the 1911 Wuchang Uprising which led to the collapse of the Manchu Dynasty. Some political observers believe that the machinery of government cannot be assembled, greased and started by that date but that it will be running before the end of this year. In any case, the establishment of a formal national regime in Communist territory is imminent, and when the new government comes into existence the Chinese Communist Party will have transformed itself from a party leading a revolutionary movement into a party running the government controlling a major part of the nation. This government will lay claim to recognition as the Government of China, superceding the Nationalist Government now scattered in refugee centers in Canton, Chungking and Formosa.

On the eve of this major political development, I will describe to you in this and subsequent letters some of the background of government and politics in Communist China. My information, like that of all foreign observers in China, is fragmentary, but I believe that during the six months I have spent in Communist Peiping I have gathered information and impressions which are difficult to obtain elsewhere.

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In the United States, "government" is a comparatively restricted term. It is generally used to refer to the elected representative bodies and the bureaucracy which together formulate and implement policies and laws. In China, however, the term must be given a much broader interpretation. The right to formulate policies, the power to make and enforce decisions with the binding force of law, and even actual administration are not concentrated solely in the hands of the civil government. One dramatic illustration of this is the fact that the Chinese Communists already govern roughly half of China and yet do not have a central government. The Communists will have a central government within a short period of time, but it is safe to predict that this government in itself will not possess a monopoly of governing authority even in the territory under its jurisdiction. There are in China, both in Nationalist and Communist territory, three parallel lines of authority -- the government, the army and the party -- and each of these carries out functions of a governmental nature. This division of power has never been completely eliminated since 1911, because social revolution, foreign invasion and civil war have created internal chaos and have prevented the stability necessary for a civil government to monopolize power and rule peacefully over the whole country. Generally these three centers of authority have been merged by the overlapping of personnel and the centralization of leadership and control, but centrifugal forces have constantly operated to keep them separate to a certain degree, and all three have carried out governmental functions through separate organizations. Almost always the party has been supreme, however, and has tried to be a power unto itself controlling both the army and the government. The supremacy of the party is striking in Communist territory, and I will therefore describe the characteristics of the Chinese Communist Party before going on to the army and governmental structure which it controls.

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According to a pamphlet entitled Textbook for Communist Party Members, (which is based largely on the "Report on Amendment of the Party Constitution" made on May 14, 1945, to the All-China Communist Party Congress by Liu Shao-ch'i, head of the Central Committee's Secretariat, expert on party organization, and major party theorist), "The (Chinese) Communist Party is organized from among workers, farmers and all laborers (including intellectuals) who are the most progressive, have the highest degree of consciousness and have determined to serve the welfare of the Chinese people and who furthermore wish to struggle for a New Democratic Society and a Communist society." According to this definition, therefore, the party has a limited class basis. The membership is restricted to workers, farmers, laborers and intellectuals. The term "intellectual" is one which can be flexibly interpreted, of course, and many of the top leaders of the party are non-proletarian in their class origin, but in theory the party's membership as it is officially defined has a class basis.

One whole chapter in the same pamphlet is titled "Party Discipline." The emphasis on discipline is not confined to this chapter alone, however, but runs as a theme throughout. When a new member is being initiated into formal party membership, for example, he (or she) must swear "...to obey the organization, to sacrifice myself, to execute orders, to observe discipline, to protect secrets...", and the pamphlet asserts that "... every party member must observe party discipline. If a person violates the discipline he will be punished by the party." This emphasis upon discipline is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Chinese Communist Party. Some people have described membership in the party as similar to the life of a professional soldier. It is a career. Once a person joins the party, he is not only bound by oath to obey party decisions, but he may be assigned to any job in any locality. Not only does a party member live and work according to assignments made by party leaders, but he is entirely dependent upon the party for his livelihood. This dependence is almost complete because of the party's system of supporting members. A party member and his family are given every care and consideration in the form of food allotments, medical care and education, but salaries are nominal. As a result party members have no financial independence.

It is difficult to enter the party. Not only must a recruit (who must be 18 years of age or over) be introduced by an old member; in addition he must obtain a personal guarantee in which a regular member assumes responsibility before the party for the new member's reliability. After introduction a prospective member must go through a long period of "political", "ideological" and "organizational" preparation. Then he must undergo a strict investigation and examination. His qualifications are thoroughly discussed by several levels of party organizations, including the Cell, Branch and District levels, and must be approved by all of them. If he is found acceptable

he is taken in as a probationary member. The probationary period varies, but at present in Manchuria it is three months for workers, agricultural laborers, poor farmers, city poor people and revolutionary soldiers, and six months for middle farmers, organizational employees, intellectuals, and so on. Only after passing the probationary testing period can a person take the oath and become a regular party member.

The effectiveness of this system in ensuring discipline and complete obedience and loyalty to the party is obvious to anyone who has observed the Chinese Communists in operation, for the party is a tightly-knit corps of carefully-selected, professional political careerists.

Discipline is one of the basic principles underlying the Chinese Communist Party. Another is the idea of leadership. "The Communist Party", states the pamphlet already cited, "has the ability to lead the action of all kinds of organizations (farmers' unions, labor unions, governments, armies)...the Communist Party is the highest command for the leadership of all organizations." Stripped to essentials, the Communists' claim is that because of their unique qualifications they compose a small group which has the right to lead the majority. This idea of the special right to rule possessed by a relatively small group is not new in China. The Confucian bureaucracy in pre-1911 China believed in themselves as a governing elite because of their scholastic qualifications, and after its rise to power the Kuomintang justified its monopoly of political power by the theory of "political tutelage" outlined by Sun Yat-sen. The Communists claim to have a special understanding of social and historical forces. The Communists specifically reject the theory of "political tutelage", but the principle of leadership as they describe it seems to be very similar. There are some differences in detail. For example, the Communists' theory of leadership does not by definition exclude the existence of other political parties in the government, as did the theory of "political tutelage", so the Communists are able to take into their fold various minor parties and political groups. On the other hand, the period of "political tutelage" as defined in Kuomintang theory was a limited period of preparation for eventual political competition in the period of constitutional democracy, and the Kuomintang finally did permit the open formation of a few minor parties (although this did not alter its real monopoly of power), whereas the Communists' theory of leadership is permanent and without limitation even in theory. In any case, the idea of leadership is an essential part of the Chinese Communists' ideology, and according to the ideology the party should be "the highest command for leadership of all organizations", both governmental and non-governmental.

The organization of the Chinese Communist Party itself is based on what is called the theory of "democratic centralization", or "centralization on a democratic base and democracy under centralized direction." One must understand the meaning of this phrase to understand the theoretical basis for Communist organizational forms. The following quotation (also from the pamphlet previously quoted) elaborates the theory. "Why say the party's system of centralization is centralization on a democratic base? For example, the organization for leadership in a Branch, the Branch Committee, is elected by the mass of party members; Branch decisions are passed after discussion by the Branch Congress (or Assembly); procedures adopted by the Branch come from the masses; and because of this the power of leadership of the Branch Committee is given to it by all the party members in the Branch. It (the Branch Committee) has the power to be responsible for representing the party masses in carrying out centralized leadership, and it manages the work of the Branch. Until decisions are altered or until the Branch Committee is reelected by all the comrades in the Branch, by the Branch Congress, all comrades in the Branch must obey the leadership of the Branch Committee, because our party is established according to this sort of principle; that is, 'the individual obeys the organization', 'the minority obeys the majority', 'the lower echelons obey the higher echelons', 'Branch organizations all obey the Central Committee'; that is to say our party's centralization is on a democratic base; it doesn't depart from democracy and isn't dictatorship of individualism." "Why say the party's democratic system is under centralized direction? For example, the Branch Congress is convoked by the Branch Committee; the Branch Committee is convoked by the Branch Secretary; or the District Committee directs the convoking of the Branch Committee or the Branch Congress. Every congress in the party has leadership; in the congresses' discussion can be carried on, opinions can be expressed to the fullest extent, and criticism can be made; this kind of democratic life is carried on with leadership. When a Branch Committee is elected this is presented to the next higher party committee for approval. Branch decisions and work must also be presented to the District Committee for instructions and can only be put into effect after instructions have been received from the District Committee. The work and decisions of all echelons of leadership organizations must first be considered by the leadership organizations themselves and then given to the Congresses for discussion. Every party act must comply with the united party constitution and common discipline. The party's democracy isn't of an anarchistic kind but is carried out with leadership."

It is clear that extreme centralization of authority is one of the most fundamental characteristics of the Chinese Communist Party.

All appointments, every decision and every act made at any level in the party must have the approval of higher authorities - which means, of course, that the power of decision in important matters is concentrated at the very top. Democracy, as the term is used by the Chinese Communists, seems to mean mass participation in party activities and party life rather than the right of ordinary party members to have direct influence on the determination of policy. Party members may discuss questions and make suggestions and criticisms, and this in fact seems to be encouraged, but once a decision on policy is made by the leaders a member merely has, as I have heard one Chinese express it, "the freedom to obey the decision."

The Communists have been successful, however, in mobilizing mass participation in organizations, both party and non-party, under their control, and for many of the persons brought for the first time into active political life, participation, even without any great influence or control over policies, is a new experience. The latest estimates of party membership made by party leaders themselves place the total membership at about three million. In view of the character of party membership there is no doubt that these three million are "active" members. The Communists have achieved a much wider base for their party, in terms of participation in party work and activities, than the Kuomintang possesses (although in its earlier years the Kuomintang mobilized many more active supporters than it has at present), but the broad mass of Communist Party members work under a system of highly centralized control by which almost all aspects of their work are defined by orders and instructions from above.

The basic unit of organization in the Chinese Communist Party is the Branch, which may be organized in any factory, mine, village or organization where there are over three party members. Every Chinese Communist must belong to one of these branches. Each Branch elects a Branch Committee, the chief of which is the Secretary of the Branch, and if the Branch is comparatively large it organizes sections for organization and propaganda. Although the Branch is considered the party's basic organizational unit, its members are subdivided into smaller groups, or Cells, each of which has a leader.

Above the branches the party organization consists of a hierarchy of committees, each with a head bearing the title of Secretary, encompassing progressively larger geographical areas. There are committees at the following levels: District, Hsien or Municipality, Region (optional), and Province. At the very top is the Central Committee. I am not clear on how the intermediate levels of committees between the District Committees and the Central Committee are selected, but if the original Soviet system of organization, upon which the party structure is based, is followed consistently each level is elected by the level immediately below it in the

hierarchy. This may or may not be the case, however. In the establishment of the New Democratic Youth Corps, which is an affiliate of the party (similar to the Komsomols in the USSR), all the regional working committees are appointed, in some cases by the Central Committee of the Corps and in other cases by the committees one level above those being selected. Whether or not the various levels of regional committees in the party itself are elected from below or appointed from above, however, they must be approved by higher authorities.

The Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Chairman of which is Mao Tse-tung, is the pinnacle of the nation-wide organizational pyramid, and it possesses unlimited authority to make decisions binding on the entire party. This committee, which has 44 regular members and 33 alternates, is elected by the All-China Communist Party Congress which meets at irregular intervals. (There have been seven of these congresses since the party was founded, and the last one was in 1945.) The All-China Congress is theoretically the supreme authority in the party, but in the extended intervals between congresses this authority is delegated to the Central Committee. The Central Committee, in turn, elects a Standing Committee, which functions in its name between plenary sessions (the most recent of which was January of this year). The Central Committee also selects a Political Bureau, a special policy-formulating group and a secretariat. In addition, the Central Committee appoints branches, called Central Bureaux, for each of the major regional areas in the country, as for example, the North China Bureau. The secretaries of each of the bureaux are members of the Central Committee, and acting in its name they are the most important party leaders in the various regional areas, outranking the local party committees in those areas.

The 77 members of the Central Committee are the most important men in Communist China. The large majority of them are old-time party leaders who were prominent in the establishment of the party or in the pre-Long March, Kiangsi period of the party's history, but a few relative newcomers have made the grade. These 77 men hold key positions, outside of the Central Committee itself, in almost all politically important organizations in Communist territory, so that the influence of the Central Committee is exercised directly through them as well as through Central Committee orders. All the top military posts are held by members of the Central Committee; these include the commanders of the People's Liberation Army (the present name of the former Red Army), the chiefs of the most important Military Control Commissions in major cities, the commanders of all important military districts, and so on. Central Committee members fill the highest governmental posts as well, including the chairmanships of the North China People's Government

and the Central Plains People's Government (the only two regional governments formally established to date which cover an entire major region of the country). In addition the national heads of important group organizations, which have just established nation-wide organizations during the past few months, are members of the party's Central Committee. These include the All-China General Labor Union, the All-China Youth Federation, the All-China Women's Federation, and so on.

The Chinese Communist Party, therefore, is a highly centralized organization of professional political workers who have delegated the power to make decisions to a key group of leaders. The policies adopted by these leaders have the force of law in Communist territory. Some of these policies apply only to party members, but others are binding on the population as a whole. Policies are implemented by the disciplined mass membership of the party together with non-party workers cooperating with them.

In the past, and at present, the party has been far more important than existing governmental organizations in the territory under Communist control. Government bodies have assisted in the implementation of policy but rarely in its formulation. It can be expected that as the governmental structure in Communist China becomes increasingly formal, permanent and uniform, the Communist party will work through the established government administration to a greater degree than in the past, but there is no reason to believe that the party will relegate itself to a subordinate position or abandon its "theory of leadership." As long as the Communists maintain power the party will undoubtedly continue to dominate the political scene, because it is founded on a theory of primary leadership and because it controls the power to assert its primacy. In this sort of framework the government does not have an independent, continuous existence; it is not an organization which several parties may compete for. The government is an organ of the party, established by it and identified with it. In practical terms, this means that in a "coalition government" set up by the Communists, minor parties will be allowed to "participate" -- but under Communist "leadership"-- and important decisions will in fact be reserved to the Communist Central Committee, as long as it possesses its present power, regardless of the form and appearance of the governmental structure established.

Sincerely yours,

A. Doak Barnett

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