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New York 18, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

I know several young Chinese in Peiping who are now trying to enter the Chinese Communist Party. A year ago probably not a single one of them would have considered this step, but now that the Communists have "liberated" Peiping it not only seems logical and necessary to them, but they are highly enthusiastic about the prospect. Shortly before I left Peiping I had a long talk with one of them, a bright young student who despite a case of tuberculosis has just graduated from Peita (Peking National University) with one of the highest academic records in his class.

In my previous letters to you about Peiping and the Chinese Communists I have written of some of my own impressions and opinions. In this letter I am going to let my student friend speak for himself. We talked about a lot of things, but because of limitations of space I will quote him mainly on what he thinks of the Communist Party, its role in China, and the requirements for being a good member. His viewpoint is probably representative of the group in Peiping which has accepted Communism completely. This group is numerically a small minority of the total population, but its members are the prime movers in the political situation, the only ones who are now politically active in Peiping.

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"Do you plan to join the Communist Party?"

A somewhat startled look appeared on the face of the student I was talking with, as if he thought "what a strange question." He answered, "Of course!" Then, becoming thoughtful for a moment, he added, "But I don't know if I can qualify or not. I still have so much to learn."

"Have you read much about Marxism - Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin?" I asked. "Yes." "And the works of Mao Tse-tung?" "Yes." "And you accept the doctrines in all of them?" "Yes." "Then what is it you have to learn before you can join the party?"

Humility seemed to creep into his voice when he began to talk about the Chinese Communist Party. "Well," he said, "before I can join the party one thing I must learn is to subordinate my own personal ideas and myself. I don't think I know yet how to sacrifice myself, to carry

out party decisions. I'm afraid, too, that I'm still somewhat of an individualist. I must completely rid myself of individualism before I'm qualified to join the party."

"Individualism?" I interrupted. "Why do you have to rid yourself of individualism? Isn't it a good thing for a person to stand firmly for the ideas he personally believes? Must not a person individually make up his mind on important political issues?"

"You don't understand what I mean," he answered. "The Communist Party represents the people. An individual cannot maintain his selfish ideas against the good of the people. One must subordinate himself to the party and observe discipline." As he went on it became clear that "individualism" and "selfishness" meant the same thing to him, so I stopped him and asked if the two words were interchangeable as he used them. Yes, they were. In short, in his mind it was self-sacrifice versus selfishness. The alternative to subordinating oneself to the party, to observing party discipline, was individualism, selfishness. "If one is individualistic one acts contrary to the interests of the people."

After hearing him talk for a while, a flood of questions came to my mind. Many of them concerned the meaning of words, because it was obvious that to understand the ideas he was describing it was necessary to have him define a great many terms. I postponed many of my questions, however, and continued along the line we had started.

"You speak of party discipline," I began. "How about democracy? The Communist Party also says that it is democratic. In what formula are discipline and democracy combined, and what do you mean when you say the party is democratic?"

"Certainly the party is democratic. It represents the broad masses of the people, and every party member can contribute his ideas and participate in choosing the leaders."

"But how about the recent article on 'The People's Democratic Dictatorship' written by Mao Tse-tung?" I asked. "It lays down the party line on many important policy matters. How did the average party member have a part in that?" As an afterthought I added, "And as I understand it, almost half the party's membership has joined since the last Party Congress and therefore had no part at all in choosing Mao Tse-tung, or for that matter any of the other members of the Central Committee who make important policy decisions."

"Again I'm afraid that you don't understand," he answered. "Where do you think Mao Tse-tung gets his ideas? On what basis do you think he makes decisions on policies? The answer is that he considers the welfare of the masses. Furthermore, he weighs the ideas and suggestions which are passed along by all the party's members. Those which really express the feelings of the majority and are really desirable for the masses are the basis of policy. That's democracy. As for the party members who had no part in electing Mao, they accepted his leadership when they joined the party. No one questions his leadership, so what you say is purely academic."

"What if you were already a party member," I interrupted, "and disagreed with a policy after it was defined? Could you dissent? Could you openly disagree with the policy and decline to follow it while you worked toward changing it?" "Of course not," he said. "Once a policy is adopted everyone must follow it. An individual must accept the will of the majority. It's the period before a policy is decided upon which is the period for discussion and suggestions, but after adoption a policy is democratically carried out. Everyone can make suggestions on how to carry it out, however. There is continual criticism and, even more important, self-criticism."

The term "self-criticism" interrupted my train of thought, and I conjured up scenes of earnest young men and women, like the one in front of me, who were spending hours every day in soul-searching. "Self-criticism" and "learning" - these are two of the most universal slogans of the times. They appear in the newspapers every day; they pop up in almost every conversation. For the young men and women trying to enter the Communist Party they are practically a way of life.

Self-criticising myself for letting my mind wander, I jerked my attention back to the main line of our conversation. "What do you mean by democracy?" I asked. "How about everyone outside of the Communist Party? There are only three million party members, but there are somewhere between 400 and 500 million people in the country. How do they fit into the picture? Does your democracy include them?"

"Very definitely," the student answered. "Everyone except reactionaries will take part in the political life of the country. The people will elect representatives in the government, and the government will be a coalition under the leadership of the Communist Party."

"In Peiping," I interrupted, "the members of the government are appointed by the party and not elected." "They will be elected," he answered. There was no trace of doubt in his voice.

"What do you mean by 'reactionaries'?" I asked. I had an idea of what this word might mean in his mind, because I had been reading Communist literature in Peiping. Landlords, "old-style" rich peasants, "bureaucratic capitalists," unreconstructed Kuomintang leaders, Kuomintang "secret service men" - the Communists continually spoke of these as reactionaries. Anyone else? "Well," he said, "even I could become a reactionary although I hope I won't." I must have looked surprised because he smiled. "Certainly I could. If I began to doubt that 'New Democracy' was the road China must follow, if I insisted on asserting my individualism, if I obstructed the leadership of the Communist Party, I could become a reactionary." The term began to take on new dimensions.

"How about 'the people'? Who is included?" "The people," he answered, "include mainly workers and farmers, but also others such as progressive intellectuals, the petty bourgeoisie and so on. The workers and farmers are most important, though. Altogether these main classes

include about ninety percent of the whole population of the country, the ninety percent which has been exploited and oppressed by the other ten percent." In short, "the people" are ninety percent of the people.

I kept on asking about words, but I don't think he minded it. In fact, I guessed that he enjoyed it. It was a chance for him to do a little extracurricular work on an unbeliever.

I took my next cue from his last sentence. I was interested in knowing what he meant by the word "exploited." I myself have seen much exploitation in China in the high rents and interest charges from which so many farmers suffer, but I wanted to know exactly what he was talking about when he used the word. "That involves a fundamental concept," he answered. "The elimination of exploitation is one of the main objectives of the revolution. You ask what exploitation means. It means getting something which you yourself don't produce. If you hire people to work for you, for example, the income which you derive from them is exploitation, because they earn it but you take it away from them. Of course we can't completely eliminate exploitation until we arrive at Socialism and Communism. That means that in the period of 'New Democracy' we have to put up with a good deal of it. But eventually it will disappear." It was an answer straight out of the textbooks.

At the risk of being tedious, I asked for a definition of one more word. "You used the word 'leadership' a few moments ago," I said. "That's a word I see constantly in Communist publications. Everyone is to accept Communist leadership. What does that mean?" "It means just what it says," he answered. "The Communists will be the leaders in all important organizations, in the government, and in the general development of the country. That's natural and inevitable. They speak for the masses, and furthermore they are...." - I prepared myself for words which I had seen in Communist propaganda hundreds of times - "...the most progressive, advanced, revolutionary and politically-conscious people in the country." Although he was speaking with obvious sincerity, it sounded a little too much like a catechism to me, so I broke in and asked, "But how exclusive is their leadership? Who else can take part?" "Look at the coming Political Consultative Conference," he said. "There are about a dozen other parties participating and representing all sorts of people." "parties?" I asked. "There are only two real political parties in China, and one of them, the Kuomintang, is excluded. The others may hope to become real parties, but now they are merely groups or cliques." He granted my point but maintained that they certainly would become real parties in time. "But," I said, "at present none of them have independent platforms. They all accept 'New Democracy' entirely, and that is why they've been invited to participate." "You're quite right," he said. "But except for the reactionaries everyone in the country accepts 'New Democracy'. That's the point. Everyone recognizes that the Communists have determined the correct road for the future, so naturally all accept

their leadership." "Let me ask you another question then. I will make it hypothetical. Suppose some group in the future disagrees with 'New Democracy', will they be allowed to openly oppose it, to write books and make speeches about it, and to propose a counter program of their own? What if some group didn't think China should travel the road toward Communism? Or, to take a different sort of example, suppose some group was even more revolutionary than the current Communist line and proposed skipping over 'New Democracy' and going directly to Communism? Would either be tolerated?" His answer was emphatic. "Absolutely not. 'New Democracy' and the general program of the Communist Party is the correct line and everybody accepts it." "But if somebody in the future wants to change the general line?" I asked. "Then," he answered, "that will be decided by discussion within the party and not by open attack from the outside."

I wondered if he approved of everything the Communists had done since taking over Peiping. I decided to test him on one issue. "What do you think of the way freedom of the press has been limited," I asked. "But we have complete freedom of the press!" he said. I passed over the fact that almost all "pre-liberation" publications had disappeared in Peiping. I didn't cite the regulations on publications. Nor did I say that previously I had written for an American newspaper but for the past five months had not been allowed to write a single word for publication because of an official order telling all foreign correspondents to cease and desist. I confined myself to a single question, "How is it, then, that no criticism of policies ever appears in print?" "Because everyone agrees with the general policies," was his quick answer. I watched him closely and saw that he believed what he said was completely true. I couldn't quite let the matter rest there, however, so I continued. "My impression is that many people, including non-Marxists, accept 'New Democracy' as a general program. But I think that at least on specific policies there undoubtedly is disagreement." He answered, "Any criticism can be made in the form of suggestions to the party. Anyone can make criticisms. For example, many business men opposed the export tax, so the party abolished it." I immediately thought of a dozen other controversial questions but decided to pass over them. "What if the party had disagreed in that case?" I asked. "Could there have been any appeal to public opinion outside the party?" His answer was definite. "If a suggestion is reasonable, the party will accept it." I tried another tack. "If a person wrote a letter to the newspapers attacking 'New Democracy' should it be published?" "No. Such a person would be a reactionary." "If he wrote disagreeing with some specific policy?" "perhaps. But it would be better to take it up with a party member. Printing all sorts of wild criticism would be a waste of paper which China cannot afford." A waste of paper? Well, I doubted if anyone had tried. I mulled over in my mind what we had been talking about. Freedom of the press - he believed it existed; I believed it didn't. Obviously we were talking about different things, because he was as sincere as I.

At this point I recalled how our conversation had started. Would the student I was talking with be qualified to join the Chinese Communist Party? I silently decided that he would make the grade, but

aloud I said, "Besides conquering individualism, what else do you think you must do before you'll be qualified to join the party?" He smiled. "I'm afraid I still have a petty bourgeois outlook," he answered. "I've got to become more proletarian in my thinking." "How can you become one of the proletariat in your thinking?" I asked. "You've had a college education. Do you think you can ever think like a farmer or worker without having had their experiences? If you could, would you want to? You want to be a revolutionary, and you're a lot more revolutionary already than most workers I've had contact with. Have you talked much with workers? They're interested in their daily millet, not in abstract principles. They have a lot less concern for other workers than you do. No, I don't think you really want to or can become proletarian in your thinking." "You don't really understand the proletarian viewpoint," he said. "The proletariat is actually much more revolutionary than members of the petty bourgeoisie such as myself. Especially factory workers. Farmers have a somewhat petty bourgeois outlook, but the workers are by far the most advanced class in their thinking."

He continued, "In a revolution, people have to change their whole outlook. It's not always easy to do. I find it difficult in many respects. But I'm working on it." "You mean you must 'fan shen'?" I asked. "Yes, I must 'fan shen'." That was it. The Communist phrase "fan shen" summed up much of what he was talking about - literally to "turn over the body," to change completely, to turn a new leaf, to start a new life. To be a Communist he would have to "fan shen." To be a Communist country all China would have to "fan shen." Is it possible? What sort of person will he be and what sort of country will China be if it is possible?

We talked for a long time and about many things. He wanted to know why "the people" in America didn't do something about the country's "imperialistic" foreign policy. There was no question in his mind about U. S. policy being "imperialistic," and he assumed that it was a policy made by "a few capitalists" without any popular support. He talked about what a great country he believed China would be after a period of Communist rule - a modern industrial country in which, he was convinced, the common man would get a break. He could see no fault with the Communists. He dismissed the difficulties which the regime would face. He had unlimited confidence in the future.

When the hour was getting late, and he was on the verge of leaving, I decided to ask one final question. He was a Christian, or at least had been, and several months previously he had been uncertain on philosophic grounds about whether he could accept Communism. "It's clear to me that you have accepted Communism politically," I said, "but how about philosophically? Do you accept materialism too?" My question was followed by a long pause. Finally in a quiet voice he answered, "Yes." I waited for him to elaborate, but he didn't. Simply "yes." But this meant that his "fan shen" was really complete. He had a new faith.

He had to leave then, and I saw him to the door. "I haven't much doubt that you'll be able to join the Communist Party," I said, but I added, "After you do, don't forget your old reactionary, imperialist friends." He laughed. "Of course not." He meant it, but I thought to myself that there might be some things he still had to learn about. I hadn't had a single long conversation with a Communist during six months in Communist Peiping.

Sincerely yours,

A. Doak Barnett

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