

by Louis Allen

Anything written about China, other than for the daily press, risks being out of date long before it gets into print. By the time this is being read, the differences between Chairman Mao and the administrative set-up in Peking may have been finally resolved, or shelved; there may even have been an intervention – though it is difficult to conceive of the Americans being foolish enough to back it – from Chiang Kai Shek. In theory, he has been awaiting just such a time of internecine strife to send an expeditionary force across to the mainland. That is, of course, if the strife is really as violent as we have been led to believe. English visitors recently (January 1967) in Canton suggest that although a few months ago there was a serious likelihood of the army under Mao moving from Shanghai against an army raised from Peking by Liu Shao Chi, this clash has been averted, and rumours of violent deaths by the hundreds in cities like Nanking seem to lack foundation.

No doubt a movement with the youthful intensity of the Red Guards will not fade back into obscurity without some violence somewhere – you can't summon up this massive support from a nation's youth (their ages seem to range from 10 to 18) and then deprive it of an active outlet. But before we jump to hasty conclusions we should be very wary of press reports, particularly from correspondents who, though they may have been inside China for a week or so (it doesn't seem to be all that difficult to get in) can't converse with the Chinese without an interpreter, or read the characters on the posters. These are usually selections from Mao's thoughts, or calls for the disciplining of some unhappy deviationist, which are plastered over the walls of the big cities and communes. There has been much play in the West with the quasi-scriptural fervour with which the little red book containing Mao's 'thoughts' is carried about everywhere and quoted, as if it has suddenly been handed down without warning from a Maoist heaven. In fact, most of what it contains has long been in print, in English as well as Chinese: it's basically a selection of some of the pithiest passages from speeches and writings already familiar to the public.

This *caveat* doesn't mean that sinologists are the only people who can interpret for us what is going on in China: there are general as well as local political observations to be made, and conclusions to be drawn which affect the politics of communist parties in most other

countries. Jean Baby's book<sup>1</sup> is, in my view, one of the most important contributions to the general debate so far, and what he says matters a great deal for those interested in the *rapprochement* between Catholic thinkers and Marxist thinkers in France. Roger Garaudy, whose views on this topic have been discussed in previous issues of *New Blackfriars* (April and September 1966), has been under fire from his more rigorist colleagues for the tentative gestures he has made towards understanding. I do not know what stand, if any, Jean Baby has made on the Catholic/Marxist issue, but I suspect from his book that he is on the side of a fairly rigid uncompromising doctrinaire approach, unlikely to make concessions, and that he speaks for a great many of his colleagues.

His book comes down firmly on the side of China in the dispute between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of China. The first half gives a detailed narrative in terms of exchanges of correspondence, meetings and congresses, of the relations between the two parties for the crucial decade 1956–1966. The second, or speculative half, discusses general topics such as the idea of permanent revolution, the role of Stalin, the wisdom of the Chinese, the reactions of the French Communist party, and the usual indictment of the United States.

That M. Baby's book makes no pretensions to be a neutral history but is in fact a fluent case for the plaintiff is quite clear from the way he treats the Sino-Indian conflict. Khrushchev, who is the villain of the piece throughout, until we get to President Johnson, was guilty of a neutralist attitude in this conflict instead of supporting China's overthrow of the 'cruel feudal' régime in Tibet. This régime, in exile in India, was manipulated by the Indians to help them retain the frontiers with Tibet and Sinkiang which had been imposed by British imperialism in the nineteenth century. We must not forget, says M. Baby, that behind the peaceful words of the Indians, their noisy declarations about neutrality and non-violence, and their shameless exploitation of Gandhi's memory, the Indian government is in fact controlled by a few big capitalists and aggressive, unscrupulous landlords. This government was attempting to seize from China an area – dismissed by Khrushchev as mountainous semi-desert, of no value – a quarter the size of France, in virtue of previous imperialist adventures at the expense of a humiliated China. What M. Baby fails to ask himself is, in virtue of what notion of the extent of Chinese territory did the Chinese determine what were, in their view, the rightful boundaries? Was it not in virtue of what were considered to be the old frontiers of Imperial China? In which case, there doesn't seem to have been as much difference in the ideological motivation behind the Sino-Indian conflict as M. Baby would have us believe.

He is perhaps more cogent when he deals with events nearer home.

<sup>1</sup>*La grande controverse sino-soviétique* (1956–1966). By Jean Baby, Paris, Grasset, 1966. pp. 444. 25 frs.

The reputation of the Soviet Union during the twenties and thirties among French Communists, the role of the latter in the Resistance, and the close relationship between Stalin and Maurice Thorez, put the French Communist Party as an official body solidly behind the Soviet Union. This has had the effect of clamping down on news from China in the official party organs and French Communists have been told by their party officials that the Chinese are simply dangerous maniacs, risking the peace of the world and breaking the united front against American imperialism. The Chinese now no longer trouble to reply to these assertions. They did this once and for all, says M. Baby, when they accused the French Communist Party of being a social-democratic party. There is a case for this, he says, and instances the silence of the French (just like that of the socialists) in face of American imperialism until the war in Viet-Nam made this position untenable. From this point of view, it is silly of them to oppose de Gaulle, whose policy is on many points admirable, and whose nuclear striking force is not aimed at communist states, certainly not at Russia, but is intended to be a counterbalance against the army of Western Germany, now stronger than that of France and backed by a more powerful industry.

'Must de Gaulle be fought?' asks M. Baby, and his answer is, 'Of course he must, but we must fight him as an independent party, capable of giving serious answers to the questions put by the masses, and not by placing ourselves on the same level as Guy Mollet or the *Canard enchaîné*. De Gaulle is a great statesman. It is not because he has concentrated power into his own hands that he is dangerous, because in fact he has not abused it, he has not behaved like a dictator or a tyrant, and in foreign policy his initiative has been on the whole a positive one. De Gaulle's incurable weakness is that he is the representative of a social order which lives by exploitation, which daily and hourly produces poverty, abuses and scandals. The gaullist régime has no future because it is dominated by forces which it cannot and will not control: but, for the time being, de Gaulle is, *in fact*, better than all the 'American-style' candidates [M. Baby means in particular Jean Lecanuet] who have offered themselves as candidates against him.' (p. 395).

The French Communist party newspapers, say M. Baby, have a very instructive line on Viet-Nam. They stress the agony and sufferings of the Viet-Nameese people, but they gloss over the need to defeat the aggressor. The party leaders must be aware, he goes on, that the party is degenerating, with the clear approval of the bourgeoisie. The only solution is for it to abandon its support of the CPSU and Khrushchev's (and his successors') 'peaceful coexistence' line. The first thing is the fight against American imperialism.

First of all, let calumnies against China be contradicted by facts: China does not, as America does through the C.I.A., interfere in the internal affairs of other countries (this does of course turn on how you interpret the adjective 'other', and it consorts ill with the proclam-

ations on Africa and the sending of Chinese technicians to African states). China's position is based on two fundamental notions: the socialist camp is *stronger* than the imperialist camp, and in the imperialist camp America is the main adversary.

To those who see in Khrushchev's actions the wisdom of a man putting world peace before the ambitions or theories of his party, M. Baby replies that the atomic bomb has been used as a scarecrow: it has made the Russians put the struggle for peace and disarmament before revolutionary activity. The Chinese are not impressed by the threat of nuclear warfare, for a number of reasons: they know the Americans will have read reports of Chinese advances in this field, and that they have no monopoly of nuclear weapons; they declare the Americans will not risk the universal reprobation they will incur if they are the first to use such weapons [!!] and, even if America did declare nuclear war, they would be unable in the long run to subjugate the whole world. It follows that the Chinese are right in refusing to regard the possibility of nuclear war as the main issue in international politics, and that a return must be made to the fundamental questions which distinguish true Marxist–Leninists from modern revisionists: do they desire the revolution or not? – and do they in practice oppose imperialism or not?

This leads to a detailed appraisal of the American situation. American prosperity rests on the profits and research made possible by two world wars, in both of which America has participated with little loss and little devastation, and on the exploitation of under-developed countries, replacing in this role the older European imperialisms. The Americans are isolated in world opinion, and their internal situation – the oppression of negroes, extensive poverty, endemic crime – is a mixture constantly threatening to explode. Crime in particular is a natural product of American society, which is dominated by the most sordid forms of gangsterism.

China, on the other hand, is not isolated. Several Eastern communist parties support her, and in spite of present differences with Russia, it is likely that if war should break out between China and the U.S.A., the Russian people would not stand by and allow their government to adopt a neutralist attitude. This, at any rate, seems to be Chou En Lai's firm belief, and M. Baby quotes a declaration made on this point in March, 1965: 'If the United States limits itself to trying to frighten people, some will allow themselves to be intimidated and others will not. There will then be a disagreement – even a very great disagreement – between the two sides. But if the United States does not confine itself to intimidation and really wishes to provoke a conflict on a wider scale, then the Chinese and Soviet peoples will unite. *Bear that in mind and you will see history will confirm it.* That is why President Johnson, who is dancing on a tight-rope and can't turn back, has a great shock in store' (p. 423). China has all the virtues America seems to lack, implies M. Baby: there is no country in the world where

dishonesty is rarer, where crime is so weak; and prostitution has completely disappeared. The people trust their leaders. Mao is as great as Lenin, and is currently directing the greatest ideological battle in the history of the workers' movement.

The issue is not really whether we agree with M. Baby's case or not. His book provides the fullest account of the Chinese case in any Western language so far. It is a one-sided case, of course, and that is precisely where its value lies. The Chinese themselves have not, at least in their English-language publications, made out such a coherent and cogent argument for a Western audience. However disturbing it may be, it is valuable to have the whole issue set before us in such detail, and with such passionate conviction. Where we go from here is, naturally enough, quite another question.