

EXTRACTS FROM THE RESOLUTION OF THE NINTH ECCI PLENUM
ON THE CHINESE QUESTION

25 February 1928

Resolutionen und Beschlusse, IX Plenum, p. 44

[At the CPSU congress in December 1927 Bukharin said that the Chinese revolution was far from dead; they might well be on the eve of a new revolutionary wave. There was no need for pessimism; Tan Ping-shan had been expelled for opportunism, and the party, now numbering between 20,000 and 25,000, was internally consolidated. Lominadze said the task of the Chinese party now was to organize for an armed insurrection under the slogan of Soviets, and to organize Soviets in certain areas, as had been done in some parts of Kwantung. (At the end of 1927, after an attack by the KMT army in Hunan, Mao Tse-tung withdrew the remnants of his forces to the remote mountain area of Chingkanshan, where he was joined by Chu Teh and his troops in the spring of 1928. His concentration on land reforms and the training of a peasant army did not at first meet with the approval of the Chinese central committee, which, in November 1927, rebuked him for regarding the industrial workers as 'auxiliaries of the peasants'.) The resolution on the work of the CPSU delegation to the ECCI stated that the Chinese nationalist bourgeoisie had exhausted their revolutionary possibilities, while the KMT had become the direct instrument of military cliques.

The meeting of the plenum appears to have been preceded by a 'Chinese conference'. At the sixth Comintern congress later in the year Pepper quoted Bukharin's statement there that to explain the Canton failure by military and technical reasons, as Neumann and Lominadze did, was incorrect. 'We did not have a sufficiently broad social basis for a victorious insurrection.' In the discussion of the Canton rising at the plenum it was agreed that preparations had been inadequate, both among the masses and among the enemy troops; the right danger had now given place to the danger that putschist tendencies would not be kept in check. The CCP was called on to reinforce its working-class core and to fight against the liquidators, as well as against those who did not understand the need for prolonged and detailed day-to-day work, but wanted immediate action against the counter-revolution. Immediately after the plenum Pravda wrote that the reactionary camp had consolidated its position, but the workers and peasants' movement had reached a higher stage, under communist leadership and the banner of Soviets. Since the bourgeoisie had not solved the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the CCP must concentrate all its force on preparation for armed revolt. The opposition renegades said that the Chinese revolution had suffered a decisive defeat; this was liquidationism.

The resolution was put forward in the name of the CPSU and Chinese CP, and introduced by Bukharin and Stalin for the first, and Li (Li Li-san?) and Sian (Hsiang Chung-fa?) for the second. It was adopted unanimously. The ECCI representative referred to in the first paragraph was Lominadze.

Trotsky, in exile, wrote to an unnamed friend that, while the resolutions on the French and British parties represented an extreme and ill-considered switch to the left, the resolution on China was false from beginning to end, a continuation of the putschist Canton policy which would lead to the defeat of the third Chinese revolution (the letter is in the Trotsky archives). Referring to the resolution in his critique of the draft CI programme, Trotsky wrote that it was wrong to say that the KMT had gone over completely to the counter-revolution. That could only happen when the class needs of the bourgeoisie were satisfied, whereas China was still disunited, still subject to outside pressure, still unable to control its own market. 'Neither the workers nor the peasants would have followed the national bourgeoisie if we ourselves had not urged them to do so.' The resolution deleted the KMT, saying the revolution had taken place largely under communist leadership. It was precisely because this was not the case that the revolution had suffered defeat. What was now called a severe defeat was at the time described as 'the transition to a higher stage'. The important question, he added, was not whether China was ripe for socialism, but whether it was ripe for the proletarian dictatorship. The two were not identical because of the law of uneven capitalist development.]

1. The present period of the Chinese revolution is the period of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, which neither from the economic aspect (agrarian revolution and abolition of feudal relations), nor from the aspect of the national struggle against imperialism (China's unification as a single State and national independence), nor from the aspect of the class nature of the government (dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry) has yet reached its conclusion. The characterization of the present stage of the Chinese revolution as one which is already a socialist revolution is false. Equally false is its characterization as a 'permanent' revolution (the attitude of the ECCI representative). To postulate a tendency in the revolution to jump over the bourgeois-democratic stage, while regarding it at the same time as a 'permanent' revolution, is a mistake similar to that made by Trotsky in 1905. This mistake is the more harmful in that it leaves out of account the outstanding national peculiarity of the Chinese revolution as a revolution in a semi-colonial country.

2. The first wave of the broad revolutionary movement of workers and peasants has subsided; by and large it moved under the slogans—and, to a substantial degree under the leadership—of the communist party. In a number of centres of the revolutionary movement—it has ended with most severe defeats for the workers and peasants, with the physical annihilation of part of the communist cadres and of the revolutionary cadres in general . . . with the complete exposure of the Kuomintang and the generals as counter-revolutionary . . . and, finally, with the transition of the entire revolutionary mass movement in China to a new stage, the stage of Soviets. .

3. At the present moment we are not confronted with a new and

powerful advance of the revolutionary mass movement throughout the country. Nevertheless there are a number of indications that the workers' and peasants' revolution is approaching such a stage. These signs include not only the heroic rising of the Canton workers, but primarily the unleashing of a peasant movement in some areas ... as well as the increasingly frequent revolts among the troops of the warlords' armies. The catastrophic worsening of the economic conditions of the masses, the financial crisis and the ruin caused by the unending wars between the militarist groups, as well as extreme political oppression, will inevitably drive the masses on the road of further revolutionary struggle.

4. The course of the Chinese revolution has underlined one of its peculiar features, that is, its extremely unequal development. It is developing unequally in the different provinces. . . . It has also until now developed unequally as between town and country. While the peasant movement is developing in a number of provinces, the industrial workers' movement, drained of blood and gripped in the iron vice of the most extreme white terror, is in a number of industrial centres going through a stage of depression.

5. This situation dictates the basic tactical line of the party. The party must prepare itself for a violent surge forward of new revolutionary waves. This confronts the party with the immediate tactical task of organizing and carrying through armed mass risings, for the tasks of the revolution can only be solved by rebellion and by the overthrow of the present authorities. Precisely for that reason all party work must now be concentrated on winning over the worker and peasant millions, educating them politically, organizing them around the party and its slogans (confiscation of landlords' estates, eight-hour day, national unification of China, liberation from the imperialist yoke, overthrow of the existing Government, dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, establishment of Soviets). The greatest danger in the present situation would be for the vanguard of the workers' and peasants' movement, because of an incorrect appraisal of conditions, an underestimate of the power of the enemy, to break away from the masses, push forward too far, allow their forces to be split. . . . The communist party will certainly be defeated and disorganized if it does not apply itself on the broadest scale to win and to organize the masses. . . .

6. Consequently the ECCI directs special attention to the necessity of intensifying the party's mass work among the workers and peasants. At the same time an end must be put once and for all to terrorist practices in the trade union movement, for these are fatal to the party. The party must fight with the utmost energy against the use of violence to get strikes called. Only if the masses are convinced of the correctness of the path recommended by the party, only if it has their unreserved support and complete

confidence, can it lead the movement. It is equally necessary to intensify work to create and extend the network of peasant organizations . . . with a separate organization for the proletarian elements in the village. . . .

7. It is necessary to struggle resolutely against putschism in certain strata of the working class, against unprepared and unorganized actions in town and country, against playing with insurrection. Playing with revolts instead of preparing the mass rising of workers and peasants is the surest way to bring disaster to the revolution. In guiding the spontaneous guerrilla actions of peasants in the different provinces, the party must bear in mind that they can become the starting-point of the victorious rebellion of the entire people only if they are linked with the new surge forward of the revolutionary wave in the proletarian centres. . . . The ECCI is of the opinion that the chief task of the party in the sovietized peasant areas is to carry through the agrarian revolution and to organize Red Army detachments which can subsequently be united into a single national Chinese Red Army.

8. The most important prerequisite for the further development of the revolution is the consolidation of the Chinese Communist Party itself, its cadres, its provincial organizations, and its centre. The Chinese Communist Party has, it is true, by and large overcome its opportunist errors (the August 1927 conference), noted in earlier Comintern resolutions, but it has not yet completely adapted itself to the circumstances of the present situation, and is vacillating both in its tactics (underestimating the dangers of putschism, terrorist methods of struggle in the trade unions, enthusiasm for the rural guerrilla movement), as well as in matters of organization. . . .

9. The ECCI believes that the Chinese Communist Party must wage an unrelenting struggle against the attempts to organize a new, allegedly 'truly communist' workers' and peasants' party, really a bourgeois-reformist party, being made by a few former communists (Tan Ping-shan, etc.). Basically, this will be a menshevik, anti-worker, and anti-peasant party, a compliant tool of Chiang Kai-shek and other executioners of the working class and peasantry. . . .

10. The ECCI considers it indispensable to undertake a careful examination of the entire experience of the revolutionary movement in China. . . . In particular, it is necessary to study the experience of the Canton rising. This heroic attempt to organize Soviet power in China, which played a tremendous part in the development of the workers' and peasants' revolution, revealed several failings in the leadership; insufficient preparatory work among the workers and peasants as well as in the enemy's army . . . their completely inadequate knowledge of what was happening in Canton, the weakness of the political mobilization of the masses . . . for which the leaders on the spot have to bear their share of responsibility before the CI (Comrade N. among others). . . .

11. The ECCI imposes on all sections of the Comintern the duty of fighting against the calumny spread by the social-democrats and Trotsky-ists that the Chinese revolution is liquidated. These calumnies only lighten the work of the imperialists. . . . The Comintern sections in the imperialist countries must fight more vigorously than ever for the withdrawal of troops and warships from China, against all attempts to annex and partition Chinese territory, against all attempts to throttle the Chinese revolutionary movement. The ECCI calls on all workers, and in the first place on all communists, to fulfil their duty of proletarian solidarity and aid for the heroic Chinese proletariat.