SUN YAT-SEN, in a statement published in Izvestia two days after his death in March 1925, expressed the hope that the day would soon come when the USSR would welcome a friend and ally in a mighty, free China, and that in the great struggle for the liberation of the oppressed people of the world both these allies would go forward to victory hand in hand.¹

This dream of Sun Yat-sen's appeared to be consummated 24 years later with the truly world-shattering victory of the Chinese revolution in 1949. It was propagated by loud, and convincing, announcements of the "unbreakable solidarity" between the USSR and China and epitomised in the top of the hit parade song "Moscow-Peking" played and sung ad nauseam throughout China in the early 50's. Nikita Krushchov at a banquet in Peking on September 30, 1959 concluded his speech thus:

Comrades, our peoples have emerged on a wide and clear road and are full of boundless energy. There are no tasks that cannot be accomplished by a thousand million people who have shaken off the bonds of capitalist slavery. We are advancing to our cherished goal full of boundless confidence in the correctness of our just cause, and rallied closely together. This unity, lit by the inextinguishable light of Marxism-Leninism, is our great achievement which we shall preserve as the apple of our eye.²

A far cry indeed to today:

With burning hatred for the enemy, hundreds of millions of armymen and civilians in different parts of China have been holding rallies and demonstrations during the past few days . . . They indignantly denounced the Kremlin's new tsars for their heinous crimes . . . The Chinese people, armed with Mao Tsetung Thought and tempered in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution are determined and have the strength to defend the sacred territory of the great motherland and hand the aggressors the blows they deserve.³

On March 11 this year the Chinese People's Daily declared that "the Soviet revisionist renegade clique thus owes a debt in blood to the Chinese people". In May the Soviet journal Ogonyok referred to the Soviet "determination to defend every little shred of our native land" and to the Soviet peoples right to "holy vengeance for every drop of blood shed by the sons of the Motherland".

Such are but a tiny sample of the incredible statements emanating from both sides in what has developed over the years from a bitter verbal wrangle to armed border clashes. The world watches agog as war preparations are made and pre-emptive strikes are discussed. The world also puzzles as to how it all came about and as to what it is all about. It is simplistic nonsense to assert (as some do) that one side is right and the other wrong. It is almost irrelevant to speculate as to who "started it". It is fantastic to imagine the consequences for the world of such a war which would be unwinnable and "endless". It boggles the imagination to consider these events from the standpoint of socialist principles for there seems little of socialist principle involved.

The Background

The answers lie, undoubtedly, in the history of China and Russia, in the particular histories of the two revolutionary movements, their Communist Parties and their place in the world communist movement and in the relative dominance of the CPSU in world communist affairs over a long period. The idea that the conflict commenced in the period of 1958 has to be abandoned in the light of the facts.

Examination of the history of the Chinese revolution reveals that it largely was fought and won against the advice and instruction of foreign communists (Comintern and Stalin). It suffered reverses and frequently catastrophic defeats when it followed such foreign advice, and won victories when it worked out its own strategy and tactics. Soviet advice throughout the history of the relations seems actuated as much by desires to protect its far eastern borders and diplomatic necessities as by desire to further the Chinese revolution — perhaps understandable but hardly a proletarian internationalist approach. For those who argue that such Soviet interests should have been the primary consideration and that the Soviet attitude was thus justified, the proof of the pudding lay in the eating as almost invariably when the Chinese under Mao Tse-tung went against Soviet advice they won victory, weakened imperialism and seemed to strengthen the communist movement.

Soviet (and Comintern) policy in the 1920's saw Chinese revolution as essentially national in character and led by the nationalist Kuo Min-tang. The young Communist Party was to work within
the KMT as individuals to exert proletarian influence. Indeed such a policy seemed ideal, for Sun Yat-sen had warm relations with the Soviet Union, likewise his successor Chiang Kai-shek. Soviet advisers (e.g. Borodin) had considerable influence on the KMT. Chiang was appointed an honorary member of the presidium at the 6th Congress of the Communist International in 1926. In the same year he wrote:

Only after the overthrow of imperialism can China obtain freedom . . . In the present world revolution, there is the Third International, which can be called the general staff of the revolution . . . If we want our revolution to succeed, we must unite with Russia to overthrow imperialism . . . If Russia aids the Chinese revolution, does that mean she wants to oblige China to apply Communism? No, she wants us to carry out the national revolution. If the Communists join the Kuo Min-tang, does this mean that they want to apply Communism? No, they do not want to do that either . . .

Strong words and also revealing words. Who could blame the Russians for placing some considerable reliance on Chiang? Yet this was penned at a time when Chiang had already commenced arresting communists and removing them from leading positions in the KMT organisation.

China was not a unified country. In the early 20's there were three main influences, the KMT in the South, and the warlords Wu Pei-fu in Peking and Chang Tso-lin in Manchuria. The Soviet Union established warm relations with the KMT in the south yet pursued diplomatic interests with Peking and Manchuria. One of Sun Yat-sen's and Chiang Kai-shek's dearest wishes was for the revolution to be extended from the south by the undertaking of the Northern Expedition aiming to defeat the feudal militarists to the north. Yet this was not originally supported by the Soviet Union who strove to retain good relations with all the main Chinese influences on its eastern borders. The Chinese communists had to be pressurised periodically to maintain collaboration with the KMT and this remained Soviet policy for a time even after Chiang Kai-shek had massacred the workers' movement in Shanghai in April 1927.

Military and peasant uprisings followed in the wake of the failure of the policy of collaboration with the KMT. The CPC general-secretary Chen Tu-hsin was sacked and denounced as a right opportunist (he had largely carried out Moscow's instructions) and Chu Chiu-pai became party leader so commencing the first left line in the Chinese Party. In December 1927 the Canton uprising was brutally suppressed after being influenced by Stalin against the better judgement of men on the spot. Li Li-san became the guiding spirit in the Party and further uprisings and frontal attacks on big cities ended in disaster.

4 Cited in Stuart Schram, Mao Tse-tung, Penguin p. 92.
In 1930 the Moscow-trained student Chen Shao-yu (Wang Ming) returned to China and along with close colleagues was installed in influential positions in the Chinese Party. Wang Ming had spent five years in the Soviet Union, where he had gone at the age of eighteen, studying the revolutionary movement. He joined the Chinese Communist Party in Moscow two years later, and was 23 years of age on return to China. Thus began the second, equally disastrous, left line of adventurism and rigidity, of ill-conceived uprisings, military confrontations with the superior forces, the slogan “attack on all fronts” which led to the victory of Chiang Kai-shek’s campaign of encirclement and annihilation in respect to the main base areas of the revolution.5

Following these defeats came the victory of Mao Tse-tung in the councils of the Chinese Party. This occurred in 1935 at the famous Tsunyi meeting in Keichow Province at the commencement of the Long March. From that time the Chinese Party shook off the Soviet influence, it developed uninhibited its own peculiarly Chinese strategies and tactics and despite incredible hardship and obstacles proceeded from victory to victory culminating in the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek in 1949.

Relations between the Chinese and Soviet communists in the years 1935-1949 appear to have been sparse, desultory and remote. The problems of relations with the Soviet Union . . . involved alongside rivalry a genuine feeling of solidarity between the Communists of the two countries. At the same time Stalin had two distinct but related goals, both of which were totally unacceptable to Mao Tse-tung. The first was to avoid pushing the revolution in China too hard if this was likely to endanger Moscow’s diplomatic position. The second was to make sure that the Communist movement in China remained under Soviet guidance and control. Although the form in which these issues presented themselves varied substantially over the years, the two basic tensions persisted during the entire period from 1935 to 1949.6

Stalin was not keen about Mao’s prosecution of the civil war against Chiang Kai-shek following the defeat of Japan. It is undoubtedly this attitude to which the Chinese refer when referring to Stalin’s mistakes in the middle 40’s. Yugoslav sources maintain that Stalin told Kardelj how he had advised the Chinese communists

5 Incidentally Wang Ming has recently emerged from obscurity by writing a pamphlet “China, Cultural Revolution or Counter Revolutionary Coup?”, a particularly vitriolic and subjective attack on Mao Tse-tung which has been circulated widely throughout the world by the Novosti Press Agency. Wang Ming sums up his “analysis” by stating that Mao “has become not only an enemy of the Communist Party of China but also the common enemy of the international communist movement. He has become not only the enemy of the Chinese people, but the common enemy of the entire progressive and peace-loving humanity”. Presumably “anything goes” in the struggle against such a man!

6 Schram, Mao Tse-tung, pp. 192-193.
to join the Chiang government and dissolve their army. (See Schram p. 238). Such attitudes on Stalin's part, it is alleged, reflected concern to placate, and not upset, the United States and so avoid jeopardising Soviet security in the Far East so soon after the war.

The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance was signed in February 1950 after prolonged negotiations conducted by Mao Tse-tung in Moscow. Mao's three months absence from China leaves the impression of some hard bargaining. Certainly Soviet credits to China of 60 million U.S. dollars annually for five years to be repaid by 1963 could not be considered immense aid. Soviet presence in Darien and Port Arthur was to continue until 1952 — yet in fact lasted until after Stalin's death — possibly due to the physical proximity of the Korean war. It was not until after Stalin died that assistance and relations blossomed.

The starting-point in the disintegration of these new close ties between Moscow and Peking was unquestionably Krushchov's secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress denouncing Stalin's crimes. This does not mean that the Chinese objected as violently to Krushchov's action as they have recently claimed. On the contrary, the Chinese press at the time indicated strong approval of certain aspects of "destalinization". Nevertheless, the Twentieth Party Congress marked the beginning of an evolution in Soviet policy, the ultimate consequences of which were to prove unacceptable to Mao, even if he did not clearly foresee them at the time.7

In 1953 following Stalin's death some rank and file Chinese communists asked the question: "Now that Stalin is dead will Mao Tse-tung have to go and work in Moscow?" This was laughingly and patiently rejected by ideological cadres. Yet after witnessing the policies of the 20th Congress and noting what they considered to be the "adventurist" and "revisionist" proclivities of Krushchov and the Soviet leadership, it is not inconceivable and indeed is almost certain that Mao Tse-tung decided that the new revolutionary HQ should be transferred from Moscow to Peking and that the mantle of Stalin should fall upon himself. Hence began the battle for hegemony in the Communist and revolutionary movement (and indeed for world hegemony) which has developed to the stage it has reached today.

More Recent Controversies

Naturally national interest and hegemonistic aims have remained obscured on both sides. For over ten years the row has developed fiercely on a wide range of issues involving almost every sphere of policy and interest: the assessment of Stalin; a formidable range of ideological questions involving peaceful co-existence and the possibility of peaceful transition to socialism in some countries; attitudes to the United States; questions relating to China's internal

7 Schram, p.285.
policies such as the communes and the Great Leap Forward; the withdrawal of Soviet experts from China; the Sino-Indian border clash; nuclear weapons; Taiwan; Czechoslovakia; the Vietnam war and many other important matters. The general course of the dispute and the arguments is well known and it is not the purpose here to examine them in detail. Yet some comments on a few are necessary.

It is interesting that assessments of Stalin are closer today than at any time since 1956. There is little doubt that official Soviet views today approximate the Chinese while they are less forthrightly expressed. The rehabilitation of Stalin proceeds in the Soviet Union, hesitantly and in muted tones.

The withdrawal of the Soviet experts with their blueprints provides one of the Soviet moves which greatly exacerbated the conflict and makes reconciliation a most long range affair. The writer, in Moscow in 1964, was shown voluminous documents which proved only the weakness of the Soviet case and pointed up the whole exercise as being designed to teach the Chinese a lesson.

Possibly the dispute over nuclear weapons provides a more basic revelation of the real issues in the Sino-Soviet conflict. This dispute did not receive any public airing until some four years after its occurrence.

As far back as June 20, 1959, when there was not yet the slightest sign of a treaty on stopping nuclear tests, the Soviet Government unilaterally tore up the agreement on new technology for national defence, concluded between China and the Soviet Union on October 15, 1957, and refused to provide China with a sample of an atomic bomb and technical data concerning its manufacture. This was done as a presentation gift at the time the Soviet leader went to the United States for talks with Eisenhower in September . . .

This accusation has not been refuted by the Soviet Union and the way in which the Soviet Government replied to it clearly indicates the correctness of the main charges while the reasons for the change of policy are, perhaps, another question. In September 1963 a Soviet statement stressed that the Chinese economic situation would have to be strained to the utmost to produce even "a few atom bombs". It complained that the Chinese had made public "classified documents and information relating to the defences of the countries of the socialist community" and had presented the facts in "a distorted light". The statement went on to stress the necessity of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons in the interests of peace and in the interests of China and argued that it would be wrong to fight against the arming of West Germany with nuclear weapons and against their spreading in the "West"

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generally while at the same time supplying China with them. It claimed that China would be better off devoting its efforts to developing the national economy and the well-being of the Chinese people than exhausting itself to produce the bomb. A further Soviet Statement emphasised that China had no need of the bomb because the Soviet Union had nuclear power enough "to wipe from the face of the earth any state . . . that might encroach on the revolutionary gains of the socialist countries."9

However sympathetic one might be towards the Soviet argument, and there is logic in it, one must easily recognise the paternalistic, interfering nature of the reply on which aspects the Chinese were quick to seize. A nationalistic government with hegemonistic ambitions would hardly take kindly to being told "We'll look after you"! Viewed in such a context the Soviet argument in reality seeks to place all socialist countries under Soviet patronage and influence — in one sense a realistic approach in the politico-military sphere yet hardly conducive of relations of equality or equal rights, more particularly when the history of the Soviet Union itself has been tarnished rather badly by national interest and hegemony.

The problem of Taiwan has assumed greater importance as the dispute has unfolded. The Chinese have in fact claimed (in their Government Statement of September 1, 1963) that Krushchov came to Peking after his Camp David talks with Eisenhower in 1959 in a bid to persuade them (the Chinese) to accept a "Two Chinas" situation on the ground that "Taiwan was an incendiary factor in the international situation". If Krushchov did make such an attempt, then it seems likely he was inspired to do so by his talks with Eisenhower. The Chinese could be excused for assuming that Taiwan was a bargaining counter in the Soviet/U.S. detente. The Soviets, in their statement of September 21, 1963, claimed Krushchov simply spoke of "peaceful ways" to solve the Taiwan issue. They added, however, that: "No doubt remains now that one of the reasons for the attack by the Chinese leaders on the policy of the world communist movement was the lessening of international tension which took place in 1959 when there was a definite relaxation in the cold war between the Soviet Union and the United States, especially after Comrade Krushchov's visit to the U.S.A..10

Indeed if such was not Soviet policy in 1959 it seems likely that it is now. There is increasing evidence of Soviet negotiations with Taiwan in the context of the growing Sino-Soviet conflict. A clear statement of Soviet attitudes to and relations with Taiwan is called for.

Why?

How can it come about that the two main socialist countries appear to be on the verge of war? The accusations hurled by each

one at the other have great similarity — new tsars, Maoist clique, return to capitalism, military-bureaucratic dictatorship, collusion with U.S. imperialism, aggressor, social imperialist, etc., etc. — heaps of wildness, exaggeration, spite and self-righteousness with elements of truth, yet with little of real marxist analysis apparent. In fact the whole sorry picture makes a mockery of socialist principles as they are practised in the two countries and seriously calls into question the protagonists degree of adherence to revolutionary socialism. It highlights the immense pressure of nationalism and self-interest which determines, in particular, external policy.

The true cause of the Sino-Soviet conflict has become increasingly clear; it is the struggle for leadership — for leadership in the “socialist camp”, in the Communist world movement, and in the world as a whole.11

Mehnert’s observation, made five years ago, is undoubtedly the crux of the matter. The Soviet Union fears China as a rival. Since the thirties Chinese Communists have never been pliant in their relations with the Soviet Union and have become increasingly less so. They owed little to the Soviet Union in the first place, in any direct sense, in the winning of their revolution except for the very presence of that country in the world scene. They grew up to very definite independence in attitude, a feature never favoured by Soviet leaderships since Lenin. For in this connection there is no Communist Party leadership anywhere pursuing independent policies who are viewed kindly by the Soviet leadership.

With the advent of China on the world scene after 1949 and their claim of China representing the model of socialist revolution for a vast part of the world the hegemony of the Soviet Union came under direct challenge.

If China had provided the model on which future revolutions among the peoples of Asia (and perhaps later of Africa) should be based, this was also a claim that China should lead and guide these revolutions towards their goal: the claim that Mao had added new truths to Marxism, meaning the experience and practice of the Chinese revolution, was also a claim that China could provide that interpretation of the orthodox doctrines of Communism most applicable in her region. These arguments amounted to a restatement in modern terms of two of the fundamental postulates of the old Chinese view of the world: that China was the centre of civilisation, the model which less advanced states and peoples should copy if they were to be accepted within the pale, and that the ruler of China was the expounder of orthodox doctrine; that, after all and always, Chinese interpretations were the right ones; truth and right thinking must come from China and conform with Chinese teaching.12

FitzGerald’s interesting and penetrating assessment is given much more weight with the more recent Chinese claims that Mao Tsetung’s Thought is Marxism-Leninism in the contemporary world

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and that the Chinese model and methods are applicable in all countries. Small wonder that the Soviet leadership, whose socialist outlook is contaminated with a national interest reflected in a hegemonistic position and aims, should be concerned. Thus the collision course developed.

The popular feeling in China against the Soviet Union is well known, whipped up by the leadership's frenzied campaign against the Soviet "revisionists" and "social imperialists". It is a nationalistic fervour seldom witnessed hitherto. For China the Soviet Union has become the Number One enemy and danger. What of the position in the Soviet Union?

After visiting the Soviet Union in 1967 Alexander Werth wrote:

In theory, the United States is Russia's Enemy Number One. But only in theory. The nuclear "balance of terror", if nothing else, makes a Soviet-American war very unlikely; moreover there has never been a war between Russia and America, and there is no area in the world today where American and Russian interests clash in any violent way. If the Americans felt that it was their duty to the "Free World" to "destroy communism", they would — and should — have started long ago on destroying Russia (rather than little Vietnam); but as De Gaulle said, there were at least a dozen different "communisms", and the Russian variety has become one of the most innocuous, with the concept of the "nation state" strongly predominating over that of "revolutionary mission" in the world.

No, the United States is not Enemy Number One. Enemy Number One — at least in Russian popular imagination is China...

Werth goes on to relate his observation of popular Russian fears... the real quarrel with China is not over ideology that it is in reality a quarrel between two nation-states; that the Chinese, already 700 or 800 million strong, will soon have a billion people, and that their population cauldron may well explode some day, and that there is something particularly sinister in the frequent incidents on the Chinese-Soviet border, and in the territorial claims made on various Russian territories in Central Asia and the Far East, allegedly stolen from China by the Russian Tsars. (p. 269).

That such widespread fears exist has been noted by Australian Communists visiting the Soviet Union. (Such fears have a disturbing similarity to the "yellow hordes to the north" idea which has been skilfully used by the Australian ruling class over long years in order to foist a policy on the Australian nation of "it's better to fight them over there before they come here".) This is further illustrated, for example, by an article printed in Pravda on August 16, following the clash on the Sinkiang frontier. The writers, discussing the rocky outcrop of the Jungarian Gates, state that through these very gates three centuries ago came foreign invaders in an avalanche onto the Kazakh steppe. The peoples' memory has retained the pain and wrath, the hatred and courage of those far-off years. The present rulers of China are sending their soldiers along the same path as the bloody campaigns of the Jungarian conquerors.

What possibilities are presented for the imperialists to choose priorities in dealing with its two major enemies is easily imagined. This conflict plays right into the hands of such governments as those of the U.S. and Australia. A conflict of such magnitude, complexity and fieriness between the Soviet Union and China relieves much of the pressure upon imperialism and weakens the revolutionary struggle around the world. The Soviet handling of the complex situation with China tends to back up the imperialist arguments of China's aggressiveness and casts doubt on the collective security proposals for South East Asia.

Is China aggressive? That dubious and even ridiculous territorial claims have been advanced in various ways is obvious. That border clashes have been provoked by China is probable. That bellicose-sounding statements have emanated from China is all too true. Yet has modern China a record of aggression? This cannot, in fairness, be said. In 1965 Sir Robert Scott the former British Commissioner General in SE Asia and former permanent secretary to the British Defence Ministry, in delivering the Dyason Memorial lecture in Sydney, pointed out that historically the Chinese had never been given to striking the first blow and that the Chinese under communism would respond only when they felt their security threatened. Numerous commentators and students of China strongly share this view as does this writer. However the Chinese Communists do take the view of keeping the pressure on their enemies, of "twisting the tiger's tail"; a tactic used against Chiang forces and the United States and obviously now against the Soviet Union. Such "pressure", presumably, will be kept up at points of disputed territory. Yet this is quite a different thing to invasion or even pre-emptive strikes. The Chinese communists' military record definitely has not been one of adventurism and ill-conceived blows against superior enemies.

Socialists cannot support military measures by either side to decide this issue. What has to be introduced into this debacle is patience, negotiations and socialist principles. Australians, of course, will be able to influence the course of events hardly at all. So that for Australian socialists the emphasis inevitably becomes the struggle to re-introduce real socialist and marxist approaches and analysis without fear or favour, scattering the myths and illusions built up over years and looking the problems squarely in the face.

Shortly before his death Lenin strongly warned of the dangers of great nation chauvinism and its effects upon the peoples and revolutions of the East and these are the problems which have emerged so clearly today. That they could emerge so strongly necessitates examination of the state of socialism in the world.