

China Policy Study Group

BROADSHEET

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DOWN WITH SUBMISSIVENESS!

Even China's sternest critics are in difficulties when they try to find fault with a campaign against the teachings of Confucius. For to cling to such ideas impedes not just progress towards socialism but even what is nowadays accepted as development. Moscow puts out dire warnings that the campaign reveals things are seriously amiss in China ('Behind the criticism of Confucius are growing contradictions within the Maoist leadership'). But in the very act of doing so Izvestia (Confucius and the Maoists, 29th March) acknowledges that 'One of the principal ideas of Confucius' teaching is submissiveness from top to bottom: the juniors should be submissive to the seniors, and the subjects to the ruler ...'

The Soviet leaders could never go on record as advocating submissiveness to the existing leadership within China. This puts them in a dilemma, since they would clearly like to see the whole Chinese nation return to more submissive ideas which have been out of favour there since the Great Leap Forward, and

even more so since the Cultural Revolution. Izvestia then gives its own gloss:

The present-day campaign of criticising Confucianism is focused on the problem of 'struggle against return to antiquity.' The 'antiquity' denounced by the Maoists stands for the practice and theory of socialist construction prior to 1958. The 'modern times' and 'reforms' mean the cultural revolution, i.e. Mao's course.

The Great Leap marked the divide between the period when the Chinese, in the words of one of their own ministers, 'had no experience in large-scale industry and could only copy the Soviet Union', and the period when they started to try their own ideas. There have, of course, been changes since then but the same basic ideas are still being followed. They are not the ideas of Confucius, opposition to which has always been implicit in the Chinese revolution and is now explicit. Nor are they the ideas of the rulers of the Soviet Union. They stem rather more directly from Marx and Lenin.

One of these ideas, much derided recently by the Russians, is that politics should always be in command. Politics in China means rejecting not just sloth, selfishness and corruption but also habits of subordination and dependence. A society aiming at self-reliance must come to grips sooner or later with all traditions implying submissiveness and acceptance of social distinctions.

No doubt bad tendencies which have been uncovered over the last ten years, even at the top of the state apparatus, have provided an object-lesson in the effects of a bureaucratic or secretive style of work. Issues such as this cannot be glossed over without compounding the error by again disregarding the rights of ordinary people. One of these is to participate in the discussion of important political questions, and at least it cannot be denied that the ordinary people are now doing this in China, in relation to traditional attitudes and the demands of socialist society.

GOING AGAINST THE TIDE

China's proletarian revolutionaries are becoming better known—as kind and friendly people! Veterans of the fierce struggles of the past 50 years, as well as young militants who have emerged in the clashes of the 1950's or the Cultural Revolution are coming to be recognised, not as the fictional monsters of anti-Communist propaganda, but as people who are more truly 'human' than those they helped to overcome. Yet the Chinese still appear to some as unreasonable—even in comparison with the great and unyielding Vietnamese people—implacable and extreme in persisting in their struggle against imperialism and revisionism, and in their lack of moderation in their efforts to eradicate the power and influence of the exploiting classes.

Although they appear incapable of restraining themselves in their revolutionary work of eradicating bourgeois remnants in China, or in criticising wrong-doing by their own leaders—in a word although they are 'hardliners'—the Chinese Communists are not being shunned by the world, as the Soviet leaders think, they should be. On the contrary, they are getting far closer to the rest of mankind than any other nation. And there are hardly any buyers for the anti-China 'security' scheme being peddled so eagerly by 'peaceful and reasonable socialists' like Brezhnev. In other words, by their very 'extremism', their rejection of half-measures, their rejoicing that the present

is a time of stress and turmoil, their continual 'going against the tide', the Chinese are acting much more correctly in the present situation than their critics. For the vast majority of mankind, particularly the peoples of the oppressed nations, the question whether some kinds of political behaviour appear uncouth or unconventional is of little relevance. In spite of weariness caused by years of frustration and overwork, weakness from chronic hunger and disease, ignorance, superstition and habits of fear and subservience, they still are not content to wait 'peacefully' for the rich and powerful to demonstrate their 'humanity' and concern by teaching the 'backward' how to conduct themselves so as not to inconvenience the greater powers and superpowers. The millions of active revolutionaries in China, in persisting in going against the tendency to look to those with wealth and power to impose solutions for the problems they have themselves caused the poor, are much more deeply aware of what the majority of mankind wants to see done than are those who condemn their extremism. It is appropriate, therefore, to begin looking at the principle of 'going against the tide' from the viewpoint of a serious and respected representative of the anti-imperialist forces in the Third World, Julius Nyerere.

Nyerere paid his third visit to China this year. Before he left he spoke movingly of the way in which the remarkable revolu-

tionary achievements of the Chinese people were related to his own socialist ideals and to the lessons he had learnt in the course of Tanzania's struggle. Nyerere's ideas of socialism have been criticised by Marxist-Leninists in Africa, but his high ideals and the progressive role he has played have won him respect. His remarks, characteristically simple, dignified and free of pretence, not only indicate how vitally the continuing socialist revolution in China serves liberation fighters and revolutionaries in Third World countries; they also show how much his experience has made him aware that it is necessary to resist prevailing tendencies and to struggle against the capitalist forces.

What impressed Nyerere even more than on his previous visits was 'the spirit of the people of China, and the apparently impossible things which have been done because of that spirit'. In Tanzania, he told his Chinese hosts, they had become increasingly aware that 'the system of government and of society which we had inherited from our colonial masters, and were continuing for ourselves, was basically an exploitative system which could not serve the people's needs'. He continued, 'capitalism is ultimately incompatible with the real independence of African states'; it is 'by its nature, imperialistic and exploitative'; it had to be ruled out as a means to development. There were, he said, problems of transition from colonial society to socialism: problems such as these had 'made many people claim that socialism is utopian and impractical, or—alternatively—that it can only be achieved by tyrannical governments and ruthless suppression of the human spirit. And to say this last thing is to say that socialism is impractical . . .' For the people of Africa, however, he believed there was no alternative to socialism.

No precedents

The demand, then, is for genuine independence, for liberation from imperialist tutelage, and for the revolutionary transformation which leads to socialism. But if, as Nyerere suggested, it is recognised that the acts of nationalising industry and joining co-operative farms do not produce the kind of transformation which will bring new relations of production, new habits and attitudes, revolutionaries like him have still to discover what needs to be done. Left-wing 'authorities' on development who are imported from any of the establishments promote policies which prepare the way for further and more intensive exploitation and oppression. People who wanted to construct a socialism which was neither an utopia nor a new system of tyranny could not expect to be told what to do, especially by officials who had no idea of what socialism was, of who were the enemies to be fought at a particular time, or of how theory and practice were related. Who then are the people qualified to take the lead, when all established systems of production and rule known in the past offer no precedents?

There are a number of questions which arise from what President Nyerere said on 29 March. They make clear how much the Tanzanians, like other people, are questioning themselves and other Third World peoples about the steps to be taken to create a new kind of social order. The conception of socialism is still vague, but there is no thought that its correct meaning may be found in what the social-democrats of Western Europe practice, or in the conformity with Soviet precedent and subservience to Soviet superpower which passes for socialism in Eastern Europe.

If, as Nyerere said, a visit to China makes him 'think about socialism and the means of building it in (his) country and in Africa', he was not trying to flatter his hosts. Nearly forty years ago Mao Tse-tung realised how important it was for other peoples in feudal and colonial societies that the Chinese Communist Party should stick to the correct line and lead the Chinese people to victory in their revolution. Today, as delegation after delegation of revolutionary Communists, workers, liberation fighters, women, youth, state leaders and others from the Third World and elsewhere go to inform the Chinese about their own struggles and problems, and to see for themselves

what the Chinese revolutionaries are doing to achieve their 'apparently impossible' victories, these visitors too must have thoughts and questions like those of Julius Nyerere.

It is not the advances in agricultural, industrial and scientific development, or health and education, that are of most fundamental significance for the world. It is that the Chinese leadership persisted in going against the tide. If they had not in the 1950's and 1960's resisted the attempt to impose the Soviet model and ideology, the prospects for a worldwide transition to socialism would be much less favourable than they are. According to Nyerere, because of the 'effort of its people, and the quality of the people's leadership' China has made tremendous progress. What needs to be explained, and grasped by other peoples, is something far more significant than the rapid growth of China's gross national product; it is the increasing power and influence of the Chinese Communists as a force independent of and in contradiction with the whole system of class domination and exploitation. The Chinese have shown that in order to free any country from feudal, capitalist and imperialist oppression, its people must work under the leadership of the working class, for the emancipation of all mankind, by abolishing class society. The advance to socialism has to be achieved by a practice and by principles of leadership which have no precedent in the whole history of class society. So the 'effort of the Chinese people' is not just toiling in fields and factories; it is in fact effort of a kind never before undertaken by workers, peasants and intellectuals. In daring to wage the class struggle, the struggle for production and scientific experiment in the way they have done under the leadership of the C.P.C., the Chinese people have gone against the tide.

There was another recent visitor to Peking, an old friend, who was received with a welcome so joyful and unrestrained that it must have seemed indecent in some of the world's capitals. The visitor was Khieu Samphan, one of the people who actually lead the Cambodians in their liberation and revolutionary struggle. It is because of what Khieu Samphan dared to do many years ago that we can celebrate the 'miraculous' achievements of the Cambodian people, who have left the imperialists with only a precarious foothold in a few towns. Chinese workers eagerly questioned their Cambodian comrades about the role played by Cambodian workers in the struggle, and vowed to learn from their revolutionary example. We know that they did not mean this as a mere polite gesture. It is because the working people and their leaders have under Mao Tse-tung's leadership been so ready to learn from others, so ready to give without stint in solidarity with forces which did not appear to have the remotest chance of victory, that they have helped obscure comrades many thousands of miles away to begin their revolutionary task.

No formulas

The dictatorship of the proletariat, as Chinese experience has shown, is not run according to a ready-made system or dogma, to which ruling Marxist-Leninist parties force people to adjust their thinking and their lives. In the struggle by Communist-led revolutionaries to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and in the period of transition to Communism there can be no formula which guarantees that the right course will always be taken and the wrong avoided. What has trained the revolutionary leaders for their task is the grasp of correct theory and practice where the struggle between right and wrong lines has been fiercest. The Chinese refer to ten major struggles (summarised in BROADSHEET, November 1973). As we shall see, Mao Tse-tung himself was able to become the great revolutionary leader and teacher he is because again and again he dared to go against the tide. And it was because the C.P.C. learnt from these struggles that proletarian revolutionaries all over the world can learn to distinguish the Marxist-Leninist principle of going against the tide from the anti-establishment attitudes of anarchist and ultra-left elements.

STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN TOWN AND COUNTRY

by Graham Towers

In the West we have come to accept urban society, with all attendant problems. The cities and sprawling conurbations of Britain now house some 85 per cent of the total population. But in China the situation is reversed: of her 700 million, only 15-20 per cent, are urbanised, while the remainder live and work in the countryside. Despite considerable industrial growth over the past 25 years, China has set her face against industrial concentration and the growth of giant metropolises. The apparent success of a policy of dispersal and decentralisation has struck visiting planners most forcibly, pre-occupied, as they are, with the mounting urban problems of the west and the failure to counteract regional imbalance.

So how has China done it? Less-than-sympathetic commentators have tended to dismiss such questions by assuming simply that the Chinese are 'socially directed' (thus *The Observer* leader, 6.1.74, refers to 'China, under its efficient dictatorship, and with its people's extraordinary social obedience'). In reality, of course, the problem is a good deal more complex than that. The urban drift which has characterised industrial development in most countries has been the result of a complex interaction of social, cultural, and above all economic forces.

From Athens to the present day the city has always been a repository of specialised services, diverse opportunities, and cultural enlightenment, which have often proved an irresistible attraction to the country-dweller. At the same time the social pressure on people in rural communities to 'better themselves' has pushed successive generations of their more adventurous sons towards the bright lights of the city.

Generally, the growth of industry has greatly compounded this imbalance. Factories were naturally built where there was a ready supply of labour—in the towns. The relatively high wages in turn attracted increased migration from rural areas, particularly in countries where the rural economy was stagnant, disorganised and struggling to support large numbers of semi-employed. In turn, the urban labour pool is enlarged and attracts more industry, creating a vicious spiral of increasing industrial concentration and continuing depopulation of rural areas and poorer regions.

The pattern is familiar. Once established it is hard to break. Partly too it is inevitable so long as a large proportion of investment capital is controlled by private hands, where it always flows to the areas which are most profitable—the areas where there is already a developed industrial infrastructure.

THE ELEMENTS OF CHINA'S STRATEGY

In many ways China had, in 1949, an almost unique opportunity to break out on a new and different path. True the Chinese city had, as elsewhere, a cultural and social grip on the mass of impoverished peasants who formed the vast majority; but in industrial terms China was virtually a clean slate. Only in a few coastal cities, built up by western capitalists from the 1850's onwards, was there significant industrial development. This fact, coupled with a commitment to industrial development under state controlled investment, made a policy of dispersal and regional balance a feasible proposition.

In economic terms alone, the realisation of a dispersal policy has been a complex process. Indirectly, the development of agriculture, which the Chinese see as the foundation of their economy, has been of paramount importance in preventing a drift to the towns. Agriculture has been re-organised, collectivised, and production has greatly increased. As a result the countryside can support and employ far more people, and the negative pressure of rural impoverishment which is so often a cause of urban migration, has been avoided.

In industrial development three strands of policy have con-

tributed to the strategy of dispersal. First, industry, particularly noxious industry, has been moved out of areas which are already overdeveloped. Shanghai city planners report that of 171 pharmaceutical works in 1949 only 45 are left, and that the 624 tanneries have been reduced to a mere eight. Quite often, when factories are moved out, their workers move with them. The decentralisation policy has enabled Shanghai to stabilise its population over the last 25 years and the city is currently depopulating at a rate of 2 per cent every year.

The second strand is the policy of developing industry around cities which before 1949 had little or no industrial base. The city of Sian, capital of Shensi province, was primarily a centre of administration and small-scale craft production. It has now expanded four times in land area, and tripled its population to 1,200,000, by developing a concentrated ring of industry and housing around its old urban core. Significantly, it is not now planned to develop any further. Such a policy, applied throughout China, has ensured that urban growth has been dispersed throughout the regions, rather than allowed to swamp existing industrial centres.

The third policy strand, which has gained increasing importance since the Great Leap Forward in 1958, has been the development of small-scale production. The 'neighbourhood factories', run by urban housewives, are part of this policy. But more particularly, all communes have built up small-scale units in the countryside. They may be workshops for repairing agricultural machinery; they may be sewing workshops, mainly run by women; or they may be more exotic craft processes like making jade ornaments. Clearly they all contribute a little to industrial production, and provide alternative occupations during the agricultural slack season. As agricultural productivity increases they may also provide an important base for occupying surplus labour, preventing urban migration which is normally the inevitable result.

These have been the main elements of economic policy, which is clearly the predominant influence in creating balanced development. But the social and cultural dominance of the city has been tackled too. The Chinese are not socially directed in an authoritarian sense, but there is clearly pressure to decentralise, not only from the authorities, but from society in general. Urban school-leavers and young people are encouraged to go and work in the countryside, whilst experienced industrial workers are sometimes asked to go and help set up factories in developing areas.

In cultural terms there have been efforts to increase the variety of rural life. Communes have recreation centres, and many have their own radio stations. There is a widespread emphasis on 'do-it-yourself' entertainment—traditional musical instruments are deliberately kept very cheap for example—and as a result most communes have their own song-and-dance group. To supplement this, film teams and professional entertainment troupes tour commune centres to perform.

These then are the main lines of China's dispersal strategy—decentralising industry from the largest cities and constraining their further growth; allowing smaller cities to expand, but only to a certain size; setting up multitudinous growth points by establishing small-scale rural units; and at the same time trying to counter the social and cultural dominance of the city.

HOW SUCCESSFUL IS DISPERSAL?

So what does it all add up to? How successful has it been as a strategy? Clearly, one test is the distribution of population between town and country. But though the figures broadly indicate stability, there are no detailed statistics available and an accurate analysis is not possible. Empirical evidence suggests that urban migration does still go on. A commune administrator

near Wuhsi, with a predominance of women in its workforce, explained that many of the men were working in factories in Shanghai and Wuhsi city itself. But if urban migration still happens it is by no means clear to what extent, and there is no way of knowing whether it is greater or smaller than the reverse flow from town to country. What is being attempted is balanced development, not urban disintegration.

A further test is to compare the lifestyles of rural and urban workers. Again, strictly comparable figures on income and expenditure are not available, but analysis of a number of random figures gives an approximate comparison for a family of five people with two workers and three dependents. Such a family in the city would have an annual income of 1,200-1,400 yuan, whereas a similar rural family would receive 800-900 yuan per annum. Housing costs would be similar, though the housing systems are different, but there is a big disparity in food costs. The urban family might spend as much as 50-60 per cent of its income on food, whereas the rural family receives part of its income in kind—grain, vegetables, etc.—and probably spends much less on food. It appears, then, that there is not much, if any, difference in disposable income.

Nonetheless there are differences. Urban workers seem to be marginally better housed than peasant families, both in terms of the quality of building fabric and facilities, and in terms of overcrowding. The cultural advantages of the city persist, too, despite efforts to counteract them—department stores displaying a wide range of goods, a wide choice of amusements.

So there is still some urban migration, there are still cultural differences and perhaps some economic disparity. As long as cities exist at all there are bound to be some differences since the city holds certain inherent cultural advantages over the countryside, and vice versa. But the object of China's strategy has been to prevent the development of sprawling giants of industrial concentration, with the implication this has of regional poverty and mass migration, not to mention the distressing problems conurbations themselves create. Prima facie evidence suggests that it has been a largely, if not totally, successful strategy.

CHINA'S ECONOMIC FUTURE

It only remains to question what implications a dispersal strategy might have for China's economic development. Western economists, perhaps bowing to the inevitable, would argue that industrial concentration has certain advantages in achieving economic expansion. They would contend that only concentration makes possible the achievement of economies of scale, the creation of a specialised services infrastructure, and the development of facilities for research and education.

Such an argument ignores, of course, the inbuilt disadvantages of large-scale urban and industrial development. But even aside from that, a dispersal strategy has certain counter-advantages, particularly in a largely agrarian society. Savings in transport costs—packaging and carrying raw materials, distribution of finished products—together with a more efficient use of agricultural labour during the slack seasons may help to offset economies of industrial scale. Similarly the very absence of specialisation may introduce more flexibility into China's economy and ensure that employment is more varied and more satisfying. Such factors are likely to bring higher productivity than the monotonous, ultra-specialised production lines of the west. Indeed the impressive creativity of Chinese workers is in itself an indication that this is so.

It is by no means clear, then, that by opting for limited urban growth and dispersed industrial development, China has hampered her prospects of economic growth. Whether the advantages of dispersal are as great as those of extensive urban concentration is a matter for continuing debate and more detailed analysis. What is clear, however, is that decentralisation of development has social advantages that industrial concentration can never provide. These rewards China seems bound to reap.

Serving the People

The following passage had to be omitted from Roland Berger's article, Chinese Economic Planning, last month. It is of sufficient interest, however, for its examples of Chinese methods, to stand by itself here.

Chinese factories producing goods for public consumption go out of their way to discover the buyers' likes and dislikes. When visiting the Changsha (Hunan) Rubber Boot and Shoe Factory in the Autumn of 1971 I found fifty workers from the shop floor were out at communes in the province studying foot sizes, suitability of shapes, durability for work in the paddy fields and generally obtaining the opinion of the consumers of the factory's products. They were interviewing some 4,000 peasants. On their return they would report to their workmates and modifications would be introduced in future production. Most factories producing consumer goods have adopted the practice of regularly sending some of their workers to the stores to sell their wares and, at the same time, obtain on-the-spot consumer reaction. Part of the practical training of economists studying at Peking University takes place in department stores. Consumers in the West who often buy a new product rather than shop around to get an old model repaired will be interested to learn that in the shopping centre in Tientsin, to serve the people and in the interests of frugality, seventy counters have been set up to repair fountain pens, wrist watches, lighters, shoes, knitwear, cotton clothing and enamelware.

REPORT TO READERS

MAY DAY GREETINGS to all our readers! In the words of the slogan now atop the building of the Export Commodities Fair at Kwangchow: PEOPLES OF THE WORLD UNITE TO BUILD PARADISE!

Paperbacks

FROM MARX TO MAO TSE-TUNG, by George Thomson, is now out of print and we are promised that the fourth printing will be ready by the middle of June. We cannot say we regret that demand has once again exceeded our expectations, but we do apologise to those who have to wait before their orders can be filled.

We have had to increase the bookshop price from 50p to 60p. The cost to those who order direct from C.P.S.G. Books at 41 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1, will, however, remain at 60p, which includes postage.

Donations

Aided by a very generous gift from a friend of long standing, we received in the first quarter of 1974 a total of £68. We thank all who contributed to this very good result.

Holidays

The office at 62 Parliament Hill will be closed from 28 May to 26 June. Book orders sent to C.P.S.G. Books (address above) will be dealt with but we must ask other correspondents to have patience.

THE CHINA POLICY STUDY GROUP

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