

CHINA POLICY STUDY GROUP
BROADSHEET

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A FIT REPLY TO AGGRESSION

LAST month we went to press too early to be able to comment on the Sino-Vietnam conflict. This month comes the Chinese announcement that it is all over; PLA troops have withdrawn completely to their own side of the frontier.

Vietnamese provocation of China started years ago and before the end of 1978 some 200,000 Vietnamese residents of Chinese origin had been driven, under very harsh conditions, over the frontier to China (see BROADSHEET, Sept. 78). At about the same time Vietnamese acts of aggression across the frontier multiplied and in the six months before February 1979 had included, according to Chinese accounts, more than 700 armed provocations and the death or wounding of over 300 frontier guards and civilians. Mines were laid within China, villages and trains fired on and property plundered. Normal life became impossible adjacent to the frontier. China issued several warnings to Vietnam, always stating that the problems could be solved only by negotiations.

Their patience at last exhausted, China counter-attacked on 17 February. The official statement recalled the consistent Chinese policy: 'we will not attack unless we are attacked; if we are attacked we will certainly counterattack.' China wanted not an inch of Vietnamese territory, only a stable and peaceful border; there was 'profound friendship' between the people of the two countries, forged in long revolutionary struggles; negotiations were again proposed.

The Chinese were explicit that they did not intend any permanent occupation, only to put a stop to Vietnamese aggression. On 5 March they announced, after only 16 days of fighting, that their objectives had been attained and troop withdrawals were beginning. On 16 March the withdrawal was complete; three provincial capitals and more than 20 other cities, towns and strategic points had been occupied.

Many here were surprised by the almost hysterical nature of Soviet and Vietnamese propaganda, which included denials that any withdrawal was taking place, accusations that the PLA was massing for an attack on Laos and atrocity stories of rape, looting and bombing of non-combatants. Typical was the 13 March tale of a massacre by Chinese troops (with 'sabres'!) of 100 children. The *Daily Telegraph* (14 March) thought this worth no more than four column-inches on an inner page and their Singapore correspondent commented: 'There was no way of verifying the Vietnamese account and experts regarded the report with deep suspicion. It was clearly part of a much broader propaganda drive aimed at gaining international attention at a critical moment in the Chinese withdrawal.' Such behaviour, as many know, would not accord with the long PLA tradition of humane treatment of all civilians and of captured troops.

Vietnamese propagandists no longer pleaded the justice of their cause, as they did during the war against

the USA. Instead they put out stories, as the US had, which few could take seriously. When a government takes the imperialist path they begin to fear truth and are forced to lie.

No appeasement

Ever since Munich Marxists, and many others, have held that aggressors should not be appeased by concessions. If China preaches this to others, as she does, it would be hypocritical to fail to practise it herself. So she was bound to counterattack. The truth of Vietnamese aggression was known to the US and Soviet governments, if only from their spy satellites, which may account both for the violence of Soviet verbal reaction and for the muted and formal tone of US protests, which were always coupled with demands for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea.

In no sense had Kampuchea been a Chinese dependency; there must have been a number of matters on which the two governments disagreed. Nevertheless, Kampuchea stood for independence of the superpowers and so got support from the PRC. This was not, however, a reason for Chinese action in Vietnam and no official statement linked the two.

The Soviet Union backed Vietnam's aggression against both China and Kampuchea. In truth it was Soviet aggression, with Vietnam, as many have said, playing in Asia the role Cuba plays in Africa. One may compare Hitler's 1938 takeover of Austria and then part of Czechoslovakia with the Vietnamese takeover of Laos and then Kampuchea. If the Western powers had taken a firm line against Hitler, instead of trying to appease him, World War II might not have taken place or might have been deferred until the Allies were better prepared. China will not appease aggressors and the support she has had from Third World countries, themselves feeling threatened by Vietnam or the USSR, is significant.

The justice of China's cause and the strictly limited nature of her action are now widely appreciated. Of course there has been opposition. Mao said: 'ghosts and monsters will jump out of their own accord. Determined by their class nature they are bound to jump out.' *The Guardian* (London) is now openly advocating appeasement of the Soviet Union, playing the part *The Times* took in the 1930s.

Soviet forces, armed to the teeth with nuclear and other weapons, stand threateningly along the 4,000-mile common border, but they prefer others to do their fighting for them. Nevertheless, China's action was not based on Soviet tactics but on a judgment of the world situation and a recognition of the duties of a socialist power. Accordingly China gives tit for tat in the struggle with imperialism, does not retreat before threats and does not confuse the Vietnamese government with the Vietnamese people, who are truly patriotic and want freedom but not at the expense of others.

Hidden hegemonism

One could speculate endlessly on the motives of the Vietnamese government in embroiling themselves with China when they have scarcely begun the reconstruction of their country after an exceptionally destructive war. Here we can do no more than make some suggestions. During the war there were still Vietnamese, as there had been for many years, who thought the whole of Indochina should be united under Vietnamese leadership. During the war relations between north and south were not as equal and comradely as they should have been, nor were Hanoi's relations with Laos and Cambodia. Those who were aware of these difficulties did not, understandably, draw attention to them at a time when Vietnam was locked in a life-and-death struggle with US imperialism, when the US was bombing Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia alike.

After the war hegemonists in Vietnam could expect no support from China but they did find an eager paymaster in Moscow, as Cuba had done. Vietnam had far

more to offer than Cuba had: a big, battle-tested army on China's frontier, a dominant position on the South China Sea and in Cam Ranh one of the world's finest ports, with massive US military installations standing ready for Soviet use. Some Vietnamese certainly hope that further militarisation will divert attention from the chaos of their economy. Again Vietnamese and Russian aims coincided; provocations on the China border suited them both.

Chinese withdrawal is complete but it would be optimistic to fancy that now all will be plain sailing. Frontier negotiations have still to take place and it seems that Laos, under Soviet or Vietnamese pressure, is taking over the task of provocation after Vietnam has been forced to rethink its tactics. What cannot be hidden is that China has shown once again that she means what she says, that she will resist aggression, that she can defeat such experienced forces as the Vietnamese, that she is not interested in the conquest of foreign territory and that she does not look on the people of any country as her enemies.

SHIFTING THE FOCUS

The Communiqué of the 3rd Session of the C. C. of the C. C. P.

The communiqué issued on 2 December 1978 is a document of the Central Committee, not of a Party Congress, thus there is no need for it to be as 'complete' as a Congress report. In our pamphlet *Mao's Last Battle* we pointed out how the Chinese Communist Party's Eleventh Congress confirmed the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. Some of these principles are not mentioned in the Communiqué, but there is after all no need for them to be continually repeated in a ritualistic way.

The Third Plenary Session is described as having taken place in a very democratic atmosphere, with views being aired freely. It was decided to close the campaign of criticism against Lin Biao and the 'gang of four' and to 'shift the focus' of work to socialist modernisation. The significance of Mao Zedong's 1956 article *On the Ten Major Relationships* is reaffirmed. The Central Committee identifies over-concentration of authority as a major problem, and argues that confusion between Party and government should be eliminated. The main effort should be devoted to advancing agriculture as fast as possible; the right to ownership by People's Communes, brigades and teams should be protected, and the team remain the basic accounting unit; management must be democratic. Tax and quotas for sales of agricultural produce to the state will be held at the 1971-75 level for some years; the prices at which the state purchases grain and other crops will be raised significantly, and selling prices of manufactured goods for farm use will be cut; at the same time retail prices of agricultural goods will be kept down. Improvements in living standards must, it is argued, be combined with education in the need for self-reliance and hard struggle.

The Central Committee confirmed as correct the work done by Comrade Deng Xiaoping in 1975, revoking previous decisions on the 'right deviationist wind' and condemnation of the Tiananmen Square incident of April 1976. Verdicts passed on certain leaders during the Cultural Revolution and earlier, which are now adjudged to be incorrect, were overturned. The session called for a strengthening of the socialist legal system; in restoring the system of democratic centralism, the main emphasis at present must be laid on democracy. The judgment, emerging as a result of broad discussion, that practice is the sole criterion for testing truth, was

confirmed. It was affirmed that Mao Zedong was a great Marxist, without whom the Party would still have been struggling in the dark; it was only natural that he should have some shortcomings. The Party now has the task of propagating his Thought in a systematic way and integrating it with the concrete needs of socialist modernisation.

The question of summing up the experience of the Cultural Revolution can be shelved for the moment, since modernisation is the greatest task. The Central Committee accepted Comrade Hua Guofeng's proposal that the press etc. should pay less attention to individual leaders and more to the masses. The right to criticise any leader was reaffirmed. A new Central Commission for Inspecting Discipline was established, headed by Comrade Chen Yun, who also became Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee. Several other new appointments were made.

The main question that will probably occur to many people is whether it is unmarxist to place the main emphasis on economic modernisation. We shall not try to give a categorical answer at this stage, but shall make some remarks which we hope will stimulate discussion. The ideological line associated with the Four had the effect of divorcing economics and politics, breaking the dialectical link between them. This problem is bound to carry over, even into people who are strongly critical of the 'gang'. The communiqué itself does not make the mistake of separating economics and politics, but it leaves itself open to such an interpretation. In an article on the 'Historic Shift' in *Beijing Review* No. 1/79, for example, under the sub-heading 'Modernisation and Class Struggle', one passage (p. 8) goes some way towards presenting economics and politics as alternatives, and thus betrays a lingering influence of the 'gang of four' line.

One important point is missing from the communiqué—the notion of *two-line struggle*. Its absence seems to us to be perhaps responsible for this problem. In our view, this concept is essential if Mao Zedong Thought is to be presented in a systematic way. If we can venture to make a prediction, it will probably not be long before it is found necessary to dust off the ideological cobwebs with which the 'gang' surrounded this concept of two-line struggle, and reapply it.

'The struggle between the socialist and capitalist roads can become a driving force for social advance' (*On Khrushchev's Phoney Communism*). In this sense, we can consider that economic work *itself requires a focus*.

In order to grasp this problem it is essential to study Marxist-Leninist theory. We suggest that, initially, it is particularly useful to read carefully the article '*On Khrushchev's Phoney Communism and its Historical Lessons for the World*' in order to get an idea of the Chinese Party's understanding of the question before the distortion introduced by Lin Biao and the 'four'; and secondly Lenin's article '*Once Again on the Trade Unions . . .*' (Coll. Works Vol. 32). If our readers study these works in the light of concrete facts which we and other sources will be publishing, then it would be useful in coming months to develop dialogue in these columns about the relation between economics and politics under socialism.

Lenin's article contains the remarks that 'politics is concentrated economics', and 'politics cannot but take precedence over economics'. And indeed, in general terms, we believe that **there is no incompatibility between concentrating upon economic work and putting politics in command**. But it is only meaningful to consider the question concretely, in the context of the distortions introduced by Zhang Chunqiao and Co., and China's tasks at present.

Lenin attacks Bukharin for pretending to mediate between Lenin and Trotsky by arguing that 'on the one hand' it is all right to have the political approach, and 'on the other hand' it is all right to have the economic approach. The 'gang of four' made much of this text. In their exegesis, Lenin equals themselves, Trotsky equals Liu Shaoqi and Bukharin equals Comrade Deng Xiaoping. But this interpretation is nonsense if one studies the text carefully, and we ourselves should at this point 'revoke' a short piece we once published on the subject. (BROADSHEET Aug. 76). Trotsky's mistakes are in some ways similar to those made by the 'four', and this is probably the reason why, sensing their vulnerability, they decided to launch a 'pre-emptive strike' and establish their own interpretation of the text!

Lenin criticises Trotsky for diverting attention away from a serious examination of concrete conditions into an abstract and sterile 'political' debate. Bukharin's eclecticism ('on the one hand . . . on the other') is wrong precisely because he too argues in a purely abstract way. If the Party can carry out a business-like study of concrete conditions then it will be able to look at problems in an all-sided dialectical way, and not in an abstract eclectic way. 'Truth is always concrete, never abstract'.

From this we learn that **to defend Marxism it is never enough to defend certain general principles, one must defend the application of Marxism to concrete conditions**.

I know next to nothing (says Lenin) about the insurgents and revolutionaries of South China (apart from the two or three articles by Sun Yat-sen, and a few books and newspaper articles I read many years ago). Since there are these uprisings, it is not too far-fetched to assume a controversy going on between Chinese No. 1, who says that the insurrection is the product of a most acute nation-wide class struggle, and Chinese No. 2, who says that insurrection is an art. That is all I need to know in order to write theses à la Bukharin: 'On the one hand, . . . on the other hand'. The one has failed to reckon with the art 'factor' and the other, with the 'acuteness factor', etc. Because no concrete study is made of this particular controversy, question, approach, etc., the result is a dead and empty eclecticism.

We have at our disposal a lot more information about the Chinese Revolution than Lenin did in his time. We have a duty to study it carefully, in a concrete and down-to-earth way. It is impossible to decide in the abstract in a general 'theoretical' way, whether the 3rd Plenary Session is right or wrong in giving more or less prominence to one or the other factor.

Lenin also points out that **'the Party learns its lessons and is tempered in the struggle against factionalism'**. He argues that a cure is now in sight: quoting with

approval Trotsky's statement that 'ideological struggle within the Party does not mean mutual ostracism but mutual influence', he says that 'The Party is learning not to blow up its disagreements.'

The relation between the two-line struggle and factionalism is a very complicated one. A faction, which exists for the purpose of seizing power, will always put forward some sort of line as a basis for its bid for power.

According to our understanding, two-line struggle runs through all types of contradiction, including contradictions among the people. In any debate there will be a line which objectively serves the interest of the proletariat in working towards Communism, and another which runs counter to these interests and would, in the last analysis, lead to the weakening and degeneration of the socialist cause. Thus, **in the struggle between different ideas, there is, so long as classes exist, always a class aspect**.

However, firstly, the criterion for judging correct or incorrect ideas (ones which benefit or run counter to the interests of the proletariat) cannot possibly be whether they measure up to certain abstract principles. Practice is the only criterion.

Secondly, the ideological struggle within the Party, and also, under conditions of socialism, in society at large, is not generally antagonistic. To start from the correct premise that all conflicts of ideas are *in the last analysis* a form of two-line struggle, and that two-line struggle reflects class struggle, and draw from this the conclusion that ideological struggles are necessarily antagonistic is false. This trick is the ideological root of the 'gang of four' theory of 'all-round dictatorship'.

Thirdly, the fact that certain comrades may at certain times put forward ideas which objectively favour the interests of the bourgeoisie does not in itself make them bourgeois *agents*, nor does it suffice in itself to create the danger of capitalist restoration.

It is now clear that the existence of a bourgeois line can at worst only create some of the conditions necessary for capitalist restoration. Another aspect of the danger is posed by the existence of *factions* which violate democratic centralism, and may at times put forward a line which is ultra-revolutionary in outward form.

Because of the revisionist counter-current on a world scale, the Cultural Revolution in its early phase was directed mainly against the danger of a bourgeois line similar to Khrushchev's. Ideologically, Liu Shaoqi represented this danger. However, from the point of view of the actual mechanism of capitalist restoration, it was insufficient to depict Liu Shaoqi as 'China's Khrushchev'; Lin Biao and the 'gang of four' fit more into this role. In *substance* Lin Biao and the 'gang of four' represented the most serious danger of a Khrushchev-style restoration. The political *form* taken by this threat, however, is more specifically Chinese, a reflection of the economic base (including the relations of production) in China.

At the same time, the struggle against Lin and the 'four' has led to a further development of Marxism, which has general relevance. Mao Zedong's principles 'practice Marxism not revisionism, unite and don't split, be open and above board and don't intrigue and conspire' were put forward in the course of the struggle and proved correct during its subsequent development.

Lenin said: 'Of course, I have always said, and will continue to say, that we need more economics and less politics, but if we are to have this we must clearly be rid of political dangers *and political mistakes*.' In the case of China, it can be said that the victory of the Cultural Revolution in exposing and overthrowing the 'gang of four' resolved the most serious *danger*. It came as something of a surprise to us that the Party decided to wind up the campaign to examine political mistakes, i.e. the discussion of questions of ideological and political line. Experience will show whether this decision, perhaps made in the interest of unity, was premature.

The communiqué preserves, even if only for the time being, the formula that all these problems can be attributed to Lin Biao and the 'four'. Nevertheless it is obvious that their line, or certain aspects of it, must have obtained support from other people in leading positions. But the meaning of this formula is probably quite clear to everyone in China. The point was to eliminate the factional system, while avoiding any witch-hunt against those who made ideological mistakes but were not part of the faction. Those comrades who have made mistakes and seriously corrected them become very strong comrades, and this probably applies in one way or another to everyone in the present leadership.

Even though the assessment of the Cultural Revolution has now been shelved, it seems likely to us that this question will continue, by implication, to occupy an important place in ideological debate over how to develop the economy, and that it will probably at an appropriate moment rise to the surface again. Our own view is that the situation in China before the Cultural Revolution was positive in the main. The Cultural Revolution exposed some serious negative aspects, but with it an incorrect line came to the fore which stated that everything in the pre-1965 period had been wrong. This line has been rightly refuted and the taboo on criticism of the Cultural Revolution removed. A certain tendency now exists, though not in the communiqué, to

regard the 1966-76 decade as mainly negative.

We ourselves do not accept this view, and believe that while the Cultural Revolution did bring to the fore new dangers, the Party has grown stronger in combating these. The experience of extremely complex struggles (sometimes deceptive in form) laid the basis among the Chinese masses for the ability to analyse political trends which produced the spontaneous popular struggle against the 'gang of four'. However, we can understand that to insist on thrashing out these issues right now would be divisive. In time, the conflict of ideas about how to develop China's economy will bring political questions to the fore again, and make them primary

The important point, which must be emphasised strongly, is that the Gang of Four line had the effect of impeding the application of Marxism to economic problems, because no ideas at all could be aired, and discussion was stifled. Hence, at the moment the primary necessity is to encourage a freer expression of ideas. For so long was the notion of line struggle used with an inhibiting effect that now it is necessary, for a time, to downgrade the importance of this concept, precisely in the interest of creating a more flourishing line struggle later. Moreover, when political questions do come to the fore again, it is quite possible that they can be resolved non-antagonistically, if there is no factionalism; this at least is the Party's aim.

THIS IS IMPERIALISM

I S.E. Asia

On November 3, 1978, the 'Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation' between the USSR and Vietnam was signed in Moscow. Articles 5 and 6 of the Treaty state:

The high contracting parties will continue to make every effort to protect international peace and the security of the peoples . . . They will unswervingly come out for . . . the final exclusion of aggression and annexionist wars from the life of the peoples, for the sake of peace, national independence, democracy and socialism . . . The high contracting parties will consult each other on important international issues affecting the interests of the two countries. In the event of one of the parties becoming the object of attack or the threat of attack, the high contracting parties will immediately begin mutual consultations for the purpose of removing that threat and taking appropriate effective measures to ensure the peace and security of their countries.

At the Kremlin dinner to honour the Vietnamese Party and Government delegation Leonid Brezhnev declared that 'for the Soviet communists solidarity with Vietnam is the dictate of both the heart and the mind. Soviet-Vietnamese friendship rests on common interests and aims and on the solid foundation of Marxism-Leninism and socialist internationalism.'

Just over a month later over 100,000 Vietnamese troops, supported by Russian Migs and tanks and armed with Russian weapons, smashed into Kampuchea. Immediately upon their seizure of the capital, Phnom Penh, Moscow hailed the hastily rigged-up puppet regime, extending official recognition, thus helping to ensure 'peace and security' for the consolidation of social-imperialist domination of Southeast Asia.

II Africa

On November 20, 1978, the 'Ethiopian-Soviet Friendship and Co-operation Treaty' was signed. It states:

In the interests of ensuring the defence capability of the high contracting parties they shall continue to cooperate in the military field.

This confirms the support of the Soviet Union for the brutal Mengistu regime in Ethiopia, expressed previously by the sending of thousands of Soviet and Cuban advisers and other military personnel during the conflict with Somalia over the Ogaden. In the same way social-imperialism 'cooperated' with Mengistu in his ruthless suppression of minority liberation struggles, especially

that of the Eritreans. The 'cooperation' included a supply of napalm and defoliants.

A further stipulation, in Article 11, is that neither party shall take part in any alliance or action directed against the other; in other words, Ethiopia will not support any country resisting social-imperialist aggression, or enter into any agreement which could impede Soviet military or economic designs; nor will the Soviet Union give support to any liberation movement which might be held to menace the Ethiopian regime. On December 2 Soviet warships anchored in the Red Sea pounded Eritrean positions. This Ethiopian-Soviet 'Friendship Treaty' provides an important base for social-imperialism in Northeast Africa.

III Middle East

On December 5 in Moscow the Soviet Union and Afghanistan signed the 'Treaty of Friendship, Good-neighbourliness and Co-operation'. Article 4 states:

In the interests of strengthening the defence capacity of the high contracting parties they shall continue to develop cooperation in the military field on the basis of appropriate agreements concluded between them.

This Treaty purports to facilitate co-operation among Asian countries as good neighbours in the interests of establishing an effective 'security system' in the area. 'International detente' is thus enhanced by the inflow into Afghanistan of Soviet military and air forces, providing a useful half-way staging post on the flight to South Yemen, the oil fields and the Red Sea. This is the sort of reasoning imperialism has always used to justify colonialism.

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UK. ISSN 0067-2052.

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