

CHINA POLICY STUDY GROUP  
**BROADSHEET**

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**BACK TO FIRST PRINCIPLES**

THE 5th plenary session of the Central Committee of the CPC (March 1980) adopted 'guiding principles for inner-party political life'. These stress the need to do away with static thinking, while also opposing the revisionist trend which negates the socialist road. They strongly emphasise collective leadership and lay down a number of requirements in relations between leaders, Party, class and masses. Flattery and glorification of leaders are forbidden and historical accuracy is to be observed in dealing with their achievements. The Party must be centralised and disciplined, while at the same time giving full scope to democracy and taking a correct attitude to those holding dissenting views. It is pointed out that 'the only way to settle an ideological or theoretical dispute is by presenting facts and reasoning things out and not by taking coercive measures'. An accompanying editorial in the *People's Daily* says that the masses should use these principles as a yardstick to assess party members, cadres and party organisations.

The CPC may in fact be closer now to what Marx and Lenin thought of as a communist movement than anything that has existed over the last half-century or so. Only time can show whether this is the case. After Lenin's death some wrong principles crept into the movement. The ideological and political struggles waged under Stalin's leadership were necessary and progressive; the socialist forces were then in a tricky position, hemmed in by fascism, and it was necessary to take firm action against Trotskyism and other tendencies which sapped the movement from within. Still, turning over the documents and memories of that period, it's clear that a bad trend emerged: even the slightest deviations were stamped on, with no attempt to show, by looking at the facts, why they were wrong. In the late 40s some grave errors were made when handling contradictions, weakening the ties between Party and masses, notably in Eastern Europe. All the resources of the state were mobilised for witch hunts, resulting in a reign of terror.

Khrushchev would not have pulled off his policies had

he not been able to exploit a correct slogan: 'restoring the Leninist norms of Party life'. This was something which needed to be done, in the CPSU and in other parties, but it's not what he in fact did. He just turned the Party into an instrument for the new bureaucracy.

Then the CPC counter-attacked and revolutionaries in many other countries followed their lead. Because Khrushchevism was then the main danger, anti-revisionists tended to defend the earlier experience of the Communist movement lock, stock and barrel. Along with the baby, Marxism-Leninism, one sometimes defended the dirty water of dogmatism, and almost made a virtue of it! Probably it could hardly have been otherwise at the time, but this seriously hampered the ability of the reviving communist movement to develop its potential.

In China, Lin Biao and the Gang of Four didn't invent dogmatism, idealism and subjectivism; they developed trends which already existed, in a form owing much to the feudal ideology still prevalent.

The struggle against Khrushchev revisionism and against the deeper dogmatist trends are dialectically linked—this is the important thing. The Chinese really *are* trying to restore 'Leninist norms'. In the struggle against bureaucracy the CPC is aiming at high standards, encouraging criticism not just of the period of the Cultural Revolution but of the errors made in the 50s, in which *all* present leading comrades are implicated. In this they are going back to the beginning, particularly to the Yan'an rectification which Mao led and which he repeatedly, though not entirely successfully, tried to find a way of carrying forward under the new conditions of socialism.

Marxist-Leninists outside China, however powerless they may feel themselves, also contribute to rebuilding the revolutionary movement. It is possible, in every country, to build a revolutionary party, at the centre of a wider popular movement and part of the struggles of the masses.

## THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

### Reassessment highlights problems, opens way to solutions

*The CPC is today seriously facing up to major problems. Some have been building up over the whole post-liberation period; others were created or aggravated by the Cultural Revolution. What they have in common is that criticism of the errors of the Cultural Revolution opens the way to solving them.*

**B**OTH for her own people and for observers outside, the Cultural Revolution is certainly the most controversial period in the tumultuous thirty years' history of China since Liberation. In its early stages it was an

inspiration for young people all over the world, already protesting against their own governments. For them, the Chinese experiment was a genuine radical alternative, giving hope to counteract the hopelessness of capitalism and disillusion with the Soviet system, which seemed a betrayal of Marxist socialism.

With the downfall of the 'gang of four' came the aftermath. The policies of the new Chinese leadership proved beyond the understanding of very many outside observers, who found it impossible to assess the Chinese

ideological and political swings and assign them to a right or left slot. For many, the new policies appeared to be a betrayal of the radicalism on which they had banked their hopes for a new future, with socialist man triumphant. Without any attempt to dig deeper, some decided that China had gone revisionist. Misled by our own ignorance and failure to analyse independently China's official publications, many of us failed to see the real meaning of the course of events.

In 1966 Chairman Mao launched the Cultural Revolution to criticise those Party members in authority who were thought to be taking the capitalist road. This was seen as part of the class struggle, ever present in the process of proletarian revolution. But it was a new method.

The Liberation had been the culmination of 22 years of revolutionary struggle led by the Communist Party. Since 1935 a broad Communist-led United Front had maintained independent armed forces which achieved decisive victory in 1949. Since then, different ways of making revolution had been used at different times. During the land reform peasants had in some places taken the law into their own hands against landlords who owed 'blood debts'. But in the main, mass movements were carried out through public meetings, small criticism groups, self-education, etc. During the 1957 anti-rightist campaign, which is now considered to have gone too far, many suffered wrong accusations and detention but there was no bloodshed. As seen by Chairman Mao, the struggles thus far had not touched the fundamental issue—revisionism in the Party—and the inner-Party struggle which took place in 1959 and resulted in the removal of the Minister of Defence, Peng Dehuai, did not solve this basic problem. Mao decided that the Chinese people, the students in particular, had by now learned enough about the nature of socialist society and the necessity of class struggle in it, to enable them to protect and develop socialism.

There was also the problem of bureaucracy, of which China had twenty centuries of experience. Anywhere and at any time, bureaucracy is a convenient and legitimate target of attack for young people; the Chairman called on them to rise and make revolution against it and against the capitalist roaders.

In a movement that swept the country, the students organised themselves into Red Guards. But soon there were splits into factions which held rival meetings and debates, and plastered the walls of institutions, classrooms and streets with competing wall posters. The Red Guards fought, often resorting to violence, each faction claiming to be the true followers of Chairman Mao.

Their targets turned out to be the President of the People's Republic, Liu Shaoqi, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Deng Xiaoping and a host of other leaders, high and low, most of whom have recently been rehabilitated. (On January 16, 1980, Deng quoted an 'incomplete' figure of 2,900,000, not including rehabilitations of many 'whose cases were not put on file or tried'.)

During the Cultural Revolution many sweeping changes were made. The most far-reaching were the integration of education with productive labour and the combination of theory and practice in education; the formation of Revolutionary Committees representing the various categories of people in each institution to promote mass participation in administration and combat bureaucracy at all levels; and the establishment of May 7 Cadre Schools by all Party and state departments (see many articles in BROADSHEET).

All these measures were revolutionary changes in the superstructure. The good results would have been indisputable if they had not been misused by the ultra-left for their own ends. If successful, this revolution could create a new moral force pushing socialist development forward; failure, however, meant chaos and degeneration. The determining factor was the leadership of the Cultural Revolution—genuine or sham Marxist?

At the start, a Cultural Revolution Group of five had been appointed by the Central Committee, but this was supplanted by another group (led by Jiang Qing) with the same title. After securing official status from the Political Bureau, the new group attacked the members of the first group as representatives of the bourgeoisie who had infiltrated the Party, state, army and all national organisations. The new group glorified Mao Zedong, exhorted the people to learn from the People's Liberation Army (then under Lin Biao) and urged that the whole country be turned into 'a great school of Mao Zedong Thought'. Well-known and respected scholars were attacked. Students were encouraged to conduct witch-hunts in government departments, to ransack offices and destroy documents. The Group took control of more and more organs of power, including the mass media. Intellectual activity was condemned as anti-revolutionary. University and college lecturers were sent with their students to the countryside or assigned to manual work in the cities. Some were confined in their workplaces, separated from their families, and their children left to fend for themselves. Leaders in factories were accused of pushing production at the expense of revolutionary politics thus putting into practice a 'theory of productive forces'. Finally, the universities and schools closed their doors and much of industry was disrupted.

Control of the superstructure was not enough for this group. They needed to get rid of all opposition in order to seize control of the whole country, and therefore had to isolate or remove Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou Enlai whom the people revered and trusted. To do this they distorted the Chairman's directives so as to create chaos, so that they could effect a military coup.

In September 1971 Lin Biao died, after his plot had been discovered, when the plane he had secretly commandeered crashed in Mongolia en route for the Soviet Union. The news leaked out, but it was two years before it was officially announced by Zhou Enlai at the Tenth Party Congress (August 1973). Following this, a campaign was organised under the banner 'criticise Lin, criticise Confucius', on the grounds that Lin Biao had quoted the feudal sage to elevate his own status to that of a genius. Although Jiang Qing had been Lin's close collaborator in the second Cultural Revolution Group, she took over the leadership of the campaign, along with Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Wang Hongwen. The Gang of Four, as they were later labelled, used the campaign as cover for their own activities.

### Second Liberation

With the arrest of the gang in October 1976, the Chinese people were jubilant and felt that they had been liberated a second time. The older generation recovered their enthusiasm, hoping to learn more and work to contribute their best to the four modernisations. For the 25 to 35 age-group, things are different. They acknowledge what they themselves gained in the Cultural Revolution, the value of their friendship with the peasants, factory workers and armed units, with whom many still keep in contact. But too many of them were left in the countryside for ten or more years without guidance or facilities for study. The very small minority fortunate enough to have secured university or college places feel that they can never make up the time lost in the best study years of their lives. While they work hard for modernisation, they feel that, through no fault of their own, they are unable to meet the country's needs. Teachers and research workers as well as students feel culturally starved because of their isolation from foreign publications for ten years (and often longer), and the generally impoverished state of libraries and laboratories whose valuable contents were often stolen or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

In 1978 millions of the younger generation made their way back from the countryside into towns and cities,

where they found themselves without jobs or chances for further education. They put the question: How, if our socialist system is superior to capitalism, do we come to be in such a condition? Having little to do, some roamed the streets, took up western dress and hair styles, became pop music addicts and showed other signs of capitalist individualism. A few even looked to President Carter to solve their 'human rights' problems.

The central government has encouraged its departments and all organisations to set up collective service enterprises and work-study schools to bring the young people into production or education, as a temporary solution while long-term programmes are worked out. This is only one of the areas of damage to the national life done by the ultra-leftists, which may well take several decades to repair.

#### The middle cadres

China has a big problem with many of the middle rank cadres, whose poor quality is notorious, and about whom the press has repeatedly printed letters to the editor and satirical stories. Some have been satirised in the theatre, and a few have actually been punished as examples. The most frequent sources of complaint are their bureaucratic style of work, indifference to the needs of the people, and persistent privilege-seeking.

Socialism in China was born out of, and had to be created by, a very large population whose forbears had for thousands of years been ruled under a bureaucratic feudal system. The imprint of this system and the ways of thought that were part of it still go very deep in people, whatever degree of education they have. Confucius' teaching on the Five Human Relationships (between ruler and minister; father and son; husband and wife; elder and younger brother; friend and friend, each of whom had moral obligations towards the other) institutionalised conceptions and practices of great antiquity. Good emperors and ministers lowered taxes and listened to the people's petitions against injustices perpetuated by local officials. By and large, the situation at any given time was a function of the balance between the struggle of the masses and the response of the *individual* on the throne or in the ministerial or provincial administrative position. Repeatedly, peasant uprisings secured short-term improvements and sometimes even resulted in a change of dynasty. But Chinese society was never capitalist and did not establish anything like western parliamentary democracy. This has its inherent shortcomings, but it does provide machinery to expose and sometimes put a brake on abuse of position.

In China, when a ruler or official was good, the people respected, obeyed and praised him in life and 'worshipped' him after his death. Ballads and dramas are full of portrayals of the good and the bad. Good rulers symbolised fatherhood; bad ones were reviled, and their images beaten after their death.

The Liberation, and socialist teaching since 1959, have loosened, but not entirely freed the people from the hold of this moral straight-jacket; mental habits are the hardest to eradicate. There was an added inertia which slowed down change. Many, who today are middle cadres, had joined the revolution at the time of liberation, when the army was advancing very fast, and large numbers were recruited to the cause, especially from the countryside. There was no time for the thorough re-education and disciplinary training of the Yan'an days. In March 1949 Mao had warned that

With victory, certain moods may grow within the Party—arrogance, the airs of a self-styled hero, inertia and unwillingness to make progress, love of pleasure and distaste for continued hard living.

The fact remains that thirty years later the faults against which Mao had spoken were even more widespread, often among cadres who had been deposed during the Cultural Revolution and restored to office since. There is widespread doubt that all such cadres can be

reformed, and strong support for the establishment of a proper system of recruitment, promotion, supervision, examination and dismissal of cadres, which is the avowed aim of the government.

Since the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Party Congress in December 1978 many new policies and concrete measures have been instituted, hand in hand with calls to emancipate the mind and seek truth from facts. The Fifth (February 1980) adopted twelve 'Guiding Principles for Inner-Party Political Life'. It remains to be seen how far ideological re-education classes based on these will be successful in persuading backsliding cadres to turn over a new leaf, and bringing Party members 'up to standard' to improve their leadership role.

In his speech of January 16 cited above (reported to have been made to a conference of 10,000 cadres in Beijing) Deng said that the Party should pay particular attention to selecting and promoting people in their forties and fifties (i.e. people trained, for the most part, since Liberation and before the Cultural Revolution).

I am afraid there are not many of that age here today. That is regrettable. It will be a sign that our cause is prospering if one day the majority of comrades sitting and listening to a report like this are in their forties.

#### Living standards

Judged by GNP per capita, China is still a very poor country. This encourages some young people to wish to share in the get-rich-quick opportunities of Hong Kong, for example, or to ape ultra-modern western life styles which they see as the hallmark of advanced countries. But they are not the mainstream. The spectacular contrast between the Chinese people's security of livelihood and the insecurity in most other Third World countries is well-known. No Chinese is on the breadline, as some are even in the affluent West, but in any case raising the material and cultural level of the whole people is one of China's top priorities.

#### Cynicism?

To deny the existence of some cynicism among young people would be self-deception, but how widespread is it? Chairman Mao once said that maybe fifteen per cent. of the people were not with the Party's principles and policies. If the proportion were so high now, this would represent 150 million individuals! No one who has closely studied the Chinese people, in the past or in the present, will believe that anything approaching this number of people are against the Party's present policy and leadership. If a foreign observer genuinely wants to learn about Chinese revolutionary history, and not just to pick out bits and pieces of information, he can get an insight from any mature Chinese with experience of old China, or even of new China before the Cultural Revolution. Such people will assure him that the overwhelming majority actively support the policies of the new Party and state collective leadership. As for the industrial workers, peasants, and those in the armed forces, their spirit of innovation, desire for scientific education and technical know-how, and enthusiasm for raising the productive forces, are beyond question. They are linked with an unprecedented level of political consciousness, shown in their support of the peoples of the Third World, their example of hard struggle and self-discipline, their analysis of contradictions and handling of contradictions among the people. The impact of all these on world history is something as yet impossible to imagine.

In this context, the cynical or anarchist-minded within China and ultra-leftist friends outside, alike deserve sympathy and understanding. But they may fall behind in making their own contributions.

There are no blueprints for socialism. China is at present one of very few countries struggling for it. The new historical stage is bound to be more difficult than any before it, but the efforts of China's people will, more and more, win the world's understanding and support.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### Dogmatism and Revisionism

1. Correspondents have questioned whether there can be any final protection—short of the purging wind of a Cultural Revolution—against the complete degeneration of a socialist society and the communist party at its head. The instinctive reply is that growing political consciousness of the people will arrest such a trend. Others say that political consciousness is one thing but socialist consciousness is a rather different matter.

It is true that when a nation is fighting to throw off foreign oppression the political consciousness that moves it forward is the desire for national independence. For the national revolutionary the goal is national self-determination. When national self-determination is won those who cooperated or compromised with the oppressor become the first enemy of the people. But they belong to a wider social stratum which is always liable to be drawn into collaborationist attitudes because its continued existence depends on exploitation of its own workers and peasantry. Socialist consciousness develops among the people as they struggle against their domestic exploiters, whether owners of means of production or a highly-organised and extortionate state bureaucracy. In China resistance to the usurpers installed by the Gang of Four mounted rapidly and they were overthrown. That must have a good effect on the people's socialist consciousness. Even if it is cynically said that all the Cultural Revolution produced was Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, there is still the secondary effect in increasing socialist consciousness.

2. Is there any difference between the common people struggling for a better deal and the struggle for socialism? The Chinese are inclined to narrow it down to public ownership of the means of production and payment of each according to his work (cf. Zhao Ziyang, *People's Daily*, 10 Nov. '79). In the past countries claiming to be socialist have fallen into the trap of moving towards the first but moving away from the second. This is not just a question of the privileges enjoyed by a bureaucratic hierarchy. They have moved away from it by syphoning off every increase in productivity into increased investment in heavy industry, including war industry, so that many years pass before the workers see any improvement in their living standards. This leads to the paradox of workers becoming as hostile to the state which owns the means of production as they previously were to the private owners.

3. To gain the confidence of the people the political theorist must put himself in the position of the people, not just on a single issue but over a longer time-span. People know they only live once, and during that time they have to provide for their family and have whatever comfort and enjoyment they are ever going to have. If the system they live under offers little prospect of improving their lot by legitimate means they sooner or later resort to unofficial or illegal means, black-marketeering, even fraudulent conspiracy. It continually has to be repeated that a leadership which looks for support in fresh steps towards socialism needs to understand that in the long run it is dealing with people, not with automatons. Eastern Europe has made its blunders here, but China has too. Many people were able to follow Mao and Zhou Enlai for a long time, because they epitomised the struggle that had brought about an improved life. Now it is only too obvious to them that the material improvements have not kept up with the efforts put in, at least by the large part of the population that labours unremittingly.

This calls for some re-thinking, not just about egalitarianism, which was always a crude aberration, but on the subject of moral or social incentives, on the role of free markets, and on how to increase flexibility at the same rate as the selectivity of demand increases. Mao gave no support to naive attitudes on incentives, insisting that any surplus realised should be fed first and mainly into light industry, which produced the things the people wanted and should have the opportunity of getting if they were to be convinced that the socialist path was the right one. (Why was his most categorical statement on this, in the *Ten Major Relationships*, kept in the background so long? Was it, as previously supposed, because of Liu Shaoqi, now rehabilitated, or because of the already-expressed hostility of Lin Biao and the dogmatists who finally got to the top through the Cultural Revolution?)

4. Changing the balance in the economy, and the system of managing the economy, is what China is mainly engaged in at present. To many it looks like revisionism. Revisionism is now being defined in political, not economic, terms, as has already been pointed out. If Ye Jianying's definition is taken up it must be conceded that China is reducing oppression of the people by giving higher priority than before to raising their living standards.

But it might be shown that the Soviet Union is reducing oppression of the people in this sense too. The Soviet Union is hardly moving away from revisionism. One thing it does do, however, is to eke out to its own people some of the benefits derived from its control over other countries (social neo-colonialism). That is to say, it is not *oppression* of the people but *bribery* of the people to get their quiescence while policies unsought by them are carried out at the will of a power elite. This is, of course, imperialism in its old familiar form. Though the origin may be different the end result is the same. If in this case it is caused by revisionism then revisionism is the creation of a power elite which has interests separate and apart from those of the people as a whole (to apply the original test proposed by Marx and Engels). The installation of a bureaucracy that makes its own terms of reference is the key step on this path. Are we going to say that Liu Shaoqi and others were untainted by revisionism? The people who supplanted them were guilty of worse things than that—including treating those outside their own faction as enemies of the people for showing revisionist tendencies.

As long as flexibility and initiative remain, the danger of revisionism remains. It is a risk that must be faced, for there is no way of exorcising it. To suppress the dialogue from which revisionist positions may arise leads to division and disaster faster than revisionism itself. The best prospect for China would be to avoid hysteria about modern revisionism, in the old suspect sense of the term, avoid putting caps on people (which seems to be a danger in big-character posters and great debates) and make sure that in no area, and at no level, is officialdom immune from scrutiny and criticism.

P.A.T.

## TO OUR READERS

IT is pleasing to be able to record that in the first quarter of 1980 we received £95 in donations large and small, all from readers expressing appreciation of our work.

Not that this indicates a period of cosy agreement on political issues. Rarely have we had so many questions about China, though now they are on internal policies, whereas two or three years ago they were about foreign policy. We endeavour to answer all questions but one of the lessons of our past 16 years is that it is better to wait and see than to express an opinion based on wishful thinking. Our editorial this month makes the point that China is 'trying to restore Leninist norms'. We cannot yet say that she has done so; only the future can tell.

### Holidays

The BROADSHEET office will be closed, as usual, for the whole month of June. When we reopen we always find a huge pile of letters and remittances awaiting us, so please make allowances if answers and receipts are delayed longer than you might on first consideration deem reasonable.

Because of our holiday the next BROADSHEET will be a double issue, for June-July, published at the beginning of June.

### Correction

In our April issue the note on page 3 should have read as follows:

*Land in the Mekong delta which once belonged to Cambodia and was taken over by Vietnam in the 17th and 18th centuries.*

THE CHINA POLICY STUDY GROUP

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