

# China Policy Study Group BROADSHEET

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## CHINA'S FIRST YEAR IN U.N.

Along with the 23rd anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Republic we can also celebrate one year of the People's Republic at the United Nations. Since China took her seat there her presence has accelerated changes which were already taking place. Class issues on an international scale have been sharply clarified and an alliance of countries and peoples fighting against imperialist domination is being developed. Quantitative changes are accumulating; the qualitative change is yet to come.

Certain new trends are gradually becoming clear. Though the superpowers may not yet fully realise it, the UN is no longer a club in which they can meet informally to settle their business affairs and bargain about the fate of the rest of the world. The approval of the General Assembly

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**On the 23rd anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China BROADSHEET joins with the people throughout the world in greeting the Chinese people and wishing them further successes in building socialism.**

can no longer be taken for granted.

UN membership has changed considerably in recent times. Of the countries that now make up the majority, the 'third world', many did not exist in 1960. Since that date the 82 members of the UN have increased to 132, but not until People's China took its seat has the third world had a permanent member on the Security Council. The USSR, intent on a division of the world with the US, cannot speak effectively for these countries and certainly does not encourage them to speak up for themselves.

China's first year in the UN has demonstrated her application to specific situations of principles long held; evaluating all problems according to their effect on the world's most important contradictions. She stands for proletarian internationalism, for self-determination, for the rights of small nations, for self-reliance and for the five principles of peaceful coexistence.

Now that China has stated bluntly that she is part of the third world the smaller nations have taken courage. She has served notice that henceforward no big power, or group of big powers, will be allowed to decide the affairs of the world. With growing determination not to be subordinated to the superpowers, weaker nations are daring to speak up in opposition to imperialism. Thus they are finding allies and have no need to shelter under the umbrella of the US or the USSR. The threat of the discontinuance of 'aid' no longer holds the menace it did.

The superpowers are still sometimes able to ignore the wishes of the majority. Glaring examples are US actions in Indochina, US imports of chrome ore from Rhodesia, and Soviet and Indian action against Pakistan. The regimes in Israel, Rhodesia and South Africa are able to carry on despite UN resolutions.

But their liberty of action is not as great as it was; they are beginning to feel the weight of world condemnation.

An example of this was seen on August 25, when China exercised her right of veto for the first time — to block the admission of Bangladesh to the UN pending the implementation of the General Assembly's resolutions on the withdrawal of all troops to their own countries and the repatriation of prisoners of war. The Soviet Union and India vigorously supported the

acceptance of Bangladesh; the US was passive. Somalia, Guinea and Sudan, temporarily on the Security Council, criticised the proposals of the USSR and India.

It is notable that India and the USSR were, in effect, seeking to persuade the Security Council to override a previous decision of

the General Assembly and that China was defending the General Assembly. Huang Hua said that China had made the firm decision to use the veto in defence of the principles of the UN Charter and the relevant UN resolutions.

This is not a matter of keeping out of the UN a small, weak country with no influential powers to support it. Rather is it a matter of foiling the attempts of one superpower to tighten its grip on the Indian subcontinent and of ensuring that if Bangladesh is admitted it will have some chance of a really independent existence.

At the UNCTAD Conference at Santiago last April — a meeting more important than some have yet realised — China had made it quite clear that she stands with the developing countries.

All the demands put forward by developing countries — for a wider zone of territorial waters, for the stabilisation of the price of raw materials, for the right of all countries to be consulted on monetary reform, for the control by oil-rich countries of their own resources — were supported by China.

Speaking on the final resolution on international trade, the Chinese representative pointed out the error of supposing that money saved by disarmament could be used to promote economic and social progress in other countries. The imperialists were determined to increase their military strength. Their arms expansion was the result of their social system and imperialist policy. Relying mainly on one's own efforts while using possible external aid as an auxiliary was the fundamental way, he said, for third world countries to develop their national economy.

Last June, at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, China angered the bourgeois world by pointing out, following the courageous speech of the Swedish Prime Minister, that the most serious pollution in the world today is

taking place in Indochina. There the environment is being deliberately destroyed by the US and puppet forces. Pollution and destruction of the environment, Tang Ke said, were linked with imperialist exploitation. Protection and improvement would come from the people themselves and no measures taken should infringe the sovereignty or ignore the needs of other countries.

Speaking on the final Declaration, on which China abstained, Tang Ke said: 'The major, root cause of environmental pollution is the policies of plunder, aggression and war pursued by imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, and in particular the superpowers.' Spokesmen of the bourgeois world would have preferred to confine the discussion to matters of technique.

Criticising the Declaration, Tang Ke pointed out that it did not condemn imperialist wars of aggression, the massacre of peoples and the destruction of the human environment, which could have permanent disastrous effects; nor did it go to the root of the danger from nuclear weapons.

He said pollution and destruction from this cause could be stopped if each nuclear power were to agree, as China had many times suggested, to the complete destruction of all nuclear weapons.

China believes that those who would fight against nuclear weapons should attack the policies of the superpowers. A world disarmament conference dominated by the US and the USSR would be aimed only at consolidating their monopoly position.

In the last twelve months China's continuous emphasis on the principle that vital decisions are the concern of all countries has significantly helped to unify the great majority and to increase their determination to stand up for themselves.

The principles of international conduct which regulate China's actions are becoming familiar to wider circles and winning increasing support. Deeds not words are the real test of policy, and that is why during China's second year at the UN the increase in her influence may well be greater than it was during the first.

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# APRIORISM

## Where wrong ideas come from

Amongst Chinese workers and peasants, abstract philosophical concepts, regarded in the West as highly obscure, are in common use. Many may be baffled, for example, as to why a term such as apriorism, which seems to have so little relevance to practical life, should concern the Chinese. Rather than dismissing this as an eccentricity, we should ask why they consider a correct philosophical approach to be essential for the building of socialism. This article attempts to show, through a consideration of what apriorism actually is, why the concept has significance both in relation to general class outlook and in particular issues of present political practice in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution.

### What is Apriorism?

Marxists constantly stress the dialectical unity or interdependence of theory and practice: that all knowledge originates from man's experience in the social activities of production, class struggle and scientific experiment, and that without a theory to guide him, man's actions are no more than random gropings in the dark. Practice is the sole criterion from which to test the truth of a theory and is the source not only of perceptual knowledge of shapes, colours etc. but also of conceptual or theoretical knowledge of the laws of nature and society. As man's social practice discovers these objective laws, they are reflected in his thinking: ideas cannot develop independently of man's own development in society.

Apriorism is the so-called scientific methodology of idealism appearing under many philosophical labels; contrary to the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge, it holds that man's thinking is independent of his practical activity; for the idealist, theory and practice are essentially distinct. While the idealist may concede that perceptual knowledge is dependent on experience, he regards conceptual knowledge as having an independent life of its own in the realm of thought. Certain truths he holds are self-evident — valid regardless of the way the world is; they are innate in the mind and are known prior to experience, hence *a priori*. The idealist thus believes that man can come to gain real scientific knowledge simply by sitting back and analysing his own thoughts without recourse to practice. Starting from the abstract idea, innate principle, or self-evident truth, he claims to produce entire systems of knowledge purely

by reasoning (as, for example, in Euclidean geometry one starts from an *a priori* definition of a straight line). As Engels describes it in *Anti-Duhring*, the *a priori* method consists in 'ascertaining the properties of an object by logical deduction from the concept of the object instead of from the object itself . . . the object has then to conform to the concept, not the concept to the object.'

### The Class Nature of the A Priori Method

Since all knowledge depends on practice, science — from the standpoint of materialism — must begin with the thorough investigation of objective reality. Marx, analysing the nature of society and history in *The German Ideology*, proceeded not from prevailing ideas about man, nor from arbitrary premises, but from 'the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live'. Starting from man's social productive activity, he demonstrates that ideology is a reflection of this process. The fact that hitherto the opposite opinion had prevailed — that ideas determine man's life process — was the result of specific social conditions. The division made by idealists between theory and practice reflects the division between mental and manual labour in a class-divided society. Apriorism is thus the world outlook of the class which does not engage in manual labour, i.e. the bourgeoisie. The world outlook of the proletariat, for whom the division between mental and manual labour is not a fundamental one but is conditional on a class-divided society, is essential in order to arrive at the truth that thought is not an independent source of *a priori* knowledge but is united with practice.

Apriorism is essentially a reactionary methodology by means of which bourgeois theoreticians attempt to foist upon the rest of the world values particular to their class as universal social values. Having fashioned their theoretical schemes from 'pure' thought, they then proceed to apply their analyses to reality and find, somewhat miraculously, that the facts confirm their conclusions, that is, 'the object conforms to the concept'. But this apparent correspondence between theory and fact is no proof of the correctness of the theory: a scientific test proceeds in the opposite direction, investigating the objective conditions in order to determine the origin and class nature of the concepts themselves. As Marx once said of Proudhon in *The Poverty*

of *Philosophy*, 'Holding things upside down, like a true philosopher, he sees in actual relations nothing but the incarnation of his principles'. Similarly Hegel, who started with the Absolute Idea, came to find his ideas realised in the German society in which he was living: the English political economists, who assumed capital to be a source of value in its own right, found their theories confirmed in the economic conditions of capitalism, and the 'pure' reason, which to political theorists such as Locke and Rousseau was the sole measure of their ideals of absolute justice and equality, turned out to be no more than the rationale of the bourgeoisie.

### Apriorism and Absolute Truth

There exists among some socialists a tendency to regard Marxism as absolute truth. This leads in effect to imposing theory artificially onto the practice of class struggle, regardless of the specific conditions of that struggle. However, the aim of proletarian thinkers from Marx to Mao has not been to develop a complete body of socialist knowledge, but to provide the tools for a scientific understanding of the laws governing the material world and society. We have seen how, by apriorist methods the bourgeoisie justify their political and economic theories as absolute, immutable truths and so (in their own interest) deny the idea of basic social change in a class-divided society. Similarly, to treat socialism as an absolute truth is to create an abstraction out of the concrete reality of a class-divided society, and so negate class struggle. For the socialist, there can be no such thing as absolute truth; no theory embraces the whole truth; man's knowledge is in perpetual evolution alongside his ever-changing social development, and at each stage is limited by and related to historical conditions. Marxism-Leninism is not a conceptual system in which all concrete ideas may be deduced *a priori*: it is a theory in constant growth, summing up the practice of labour in its ongoing struggle against capital within the general framework of historical materialism. Uniting theory with practice necessitates using the Marxist tools of analysis to explain the developing process of class struggle, and basing action on this analysis. Theory then becomes an integral part of life, not something imposed on it from outside.

Social practice determines theory but theory may also determine social practice: 'without theory there can be no revolu-

tionary movement', Lenin said. Man's practice, his experience, must be summarised, and concentrated, and brought back to practice. The distilled knowledge will change the practice that follows. During the Cultural Revolution, there were those who exalted Mao Tse-tung Thought as absolute truth, and lost their ability to think critically. This amounted to substituting an apriorist attitude — assuming all the answers as already given. Such an attitude leads to neglect of practice and the ability to constantly develop new practice to meet changing conditions — the core of dialectical materialist thinking. The Chinese themselves condemn this absolutising of Marxist-Leninist theory as 'waving the red flag to oppose the red flag'. This apparently leftist deviation turns out to be rightist in content; blinding the masses, impeding the scientific development of socialist theory, and reducing it to a static bulk of empty phrases; it thus becomes all the easier to develop the theory *a priori*, adding new concepts by sleight of hand, without any basis in practice, that is, it becomes more accessible to revisionism.

### Apriorism and Individual Genius

A natural corollary to the apriorist notion of absolute truth is the concept of the individual genius who, understanding the absolute truth, has all the answers and therefore holds the destiny of mankind in his hands. This idea that history is made by great men, whose inborn qualities of leadership endow them with the absolute authority to determine events, is pure idealism, based on the apriorist view of knowledge as the possession of individuals, not of classes. It is a bourgeois view which negates class struggle. Marxists do not deny that leaders and geniuses have a role; but they see them, not as isolated individuals, but as men dependent upon the social practice of the people, with the ability to distil and concentrate the wisdom of the people. If there were no masses there would be no genius. Putting Mao on a pedestal divorces him from the masses and leaves a gap into which bourgeois leadership may insinuate itself.

As the practice of socialism develops, revolutionaries must constantly investigate objective conditions and sum up the experience of the masses in order to work out the way forward.

## CULTURAL REVOLUTION AT PEKING UNIVERSITY

The following article is by two young Americans who spent seven weeks in China during April and May of this year.

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Peking University has a long history of revolutionary activity. Its students helped overthrow the Ch'ing Dynasty in 1911; the famous May 4th Movement broke out at Peking University in 1919, and it was not surprising that some of the earliest struggles of the 1966 Cultural Revolution were waged there. As a result of these struggles the university has changed greatly in its 74 years. Perhaps some of the most profound changes came during the Cultural Revolution. Its students are now workers, peasants and soldiers, and the school combines labour and study to make education serve the interests of the working people of China.

The Cultural Revolution at Peking University began in May 1966 when some teachers and students put up a 'big character poster' criticising the university's leadership. They charged the leadership's aim was to restore capitalism, not to build socialism. This poster was made public and broadcast all over China. The campus was soon boiling, and thousands of big character posters were put up. A fierce and complicated struggle

ensued, with the now well-known Red Guard groups playing a leading role. By June 1967 the old leadership of the University had been exposed and discredited. But then a new period of struggle evolved between different student groups. This was a period of factionalism and internal squabbling. It holds lessons for all revolutionaries.

This period was described by a young man, now a teacher and leader at the University, who had been a student at the time. 'Two factions developed with different opinions about the Cultural Revolution Committee, the temporary leading body at the university. Some thought the Committee was itself revisionist or reactionary, some thought not. It had been elected by the students and teachers but there were no workers or soldiers on it. It was composed only of intellectuals.

'At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution it did some good work. It led students to repudiate Lu Ping (the old President of Peking University) and to carry on revolution and go to the countryside and other parts of the country. Those things were correct. But because their world outlook was not completely remoulded, they made mistakes.

'Some considered the power given by the teachers and students as their own personal power. They didn't listen to criticism, but only listened to praise. They said all criticism

was an "adverse current", and they called their critics reactionaries. They didn't follow Chairman Mao's teaching to "draw a clear line between the contradictions among ourselves and the contradictions with the enemy". Since they wouldn't take any criticism from the masses, dissatisfaction set in.

Two groups developed. One believed the Committee had adopted a new revisionist line. They wanted to repudiate the Committee. The other group said it had made mistakes and should be criticised, but not repudiated. The Committee itself did not learn from the previous year's experience of the Cultural Revolution and stood only by the side of the group which supported it. This sharpened the differences between the two factions. Most had not yet thoroughly remoulded their political consciousness. We didn't think it necessary to criticise ourselves. We thought we were the most important people; "without us, the world would not turn". Class enemies were able to take advantage of this situation to get us to fight each other.

'Class enemies spread the "only I am correct" type of thinking. They led people to think "only I am revolutionary"; "only I am on the left". Each group insisted on its viewpoint and the class enemies fanned the fire. Some class enemies told the two groups that their differences were "fundamental", and that they could not make compromises with each other.

'By June 1967 the two groups were totally separated. Based on their original different viewpoints, the two groups began to adopt differences on other matters.

'For example, at this time many of the cadres at the university had stopped working altogether, and the two groups differed on how to deal with cadre problems. There were differences on who was a "bad" and who was a "good" cadre.

'They called each other names, like "revisionists" or "reactionaries". They attacked each other as class enemies and did not use a proletarian viewpoint to judge things. They judged things only in terms of their group, their factional perspective.

'Both groups actually were composed of revolutionary people, but at this point the class enemies began to say "history is written by strong men" and "we should use arms". Fanned by class enemies, fighting broke out in March 1968. This only lasted a short period but it led the revolution astray.

'Bricks, stones and sticks were used at first and then broadswords and spears. Each side occupied some dormitories for their own use. We neglected the most important task, to repudiate the capitalist roaders. Some class brothers were wounded during the fighting, so workers and peasants were against us for fighting.

'Many of us knew this was not following Chairman Mao's teaching, but we couldn't change the situation. Many people left Peking University when fighting broke out and went to factories and the countryside. Some went home. The number of people at the university fell to between one hundred and two hundred, although both sides claimed a following of four thousand. The leaders of the groups became "generals without an army".

'At this time Chairman Mao made a nation-wide call for workers to take leadership in everything. In August 1968 a Workers' and People's Liberation Army Propaganda Team came in the university.'

Here the veteran Red Guard paused and asked a member of that Propaganda Team to continue. The team is still at the university, a permanent part of its leadership. When it arrived it was very large, with 600 workers and 100 soldiers. Today it has about 100 workers and 50 PLA members. Chang Chuang-you, a worker from Hsinhua Printing House, had been a member of the original team. He continued the story:

'The first thing we did was to propagate Chairman Mao's teachings. Debate by reasoning was used, not force. We asked the groups to pull down their fortresses and go to classrooms to unite together. Soon we had unity but only in organisation. The groups were not united ideologically until later. We organised Mao Tse-tung Thought study classes for the students and teachers. We gave them class education by asking old workers and peasants to come and tell them of the bitter life in

the old society. In this way we led students to see their fighting only benefitted the class enemies.

'About one third of the teachers and students were activists and they were the first ones to understand the need for unity. We held meetings in their departments where they spoke out and influenced the others. Thus the whole university was pushed forward.

'We had three principles in our work. First, no matter what group you are in, if you follow the teachings of Chairman Mao we will support you. Second, wrong ideas and wrong actions are dealt with in study sessions and meetings to help people see their mistakes. Third, we will wage mass movements to criticise or remove from leadership those deliberately opposing Mao's teachings. There were very few in this third group, and even here those who admitted their mistakes and corrected themselves still had a way out.

'When the masses of students and teachers came to understand the need for unity, the handful of class enemies were isolated. Repudiating them was also a class education for the masses.

'It took four to six months to achieve ideological unity. At first there were some who spoke of unity at meetings but acted differently. As Chairman Mao said, "they shook hands over the table; they kicked each other underneath".

'The Workers and PLA Propaganda Team was able to accomplish this only because we applied the teachings of Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse-tung Thought, not because we were heroes. In this group talking to you today are people who were in different factions during the Cultural Revolution.'

The group summed up this experience: 'We now know that if we only depend on intellectuals we cannot manage our affairs well. We know the working class must exercise leadership in everything.

'The process of eliminating factionalism is a process of remoulding one's world outlook. Factionalism and sectarianism are aspects of bourgeois individualism. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution the bourgeois world outlook still influenced us. We sought careers and fame. We were narrow minded. As Chairman Mao said, we had lost our heads; we were swollen from head to foot. We learned that class enemies can instigate factionalism when we make these mistakes.'

The meeting had been long and friendly. Our hosts were obviously veterans of serious and complex political struggle. Yet they were also able to laugh and joke about their past errors — in a healthy way, seeing the ridiculous for what it was but not overlooking its politically serious side. Their struggle affected all China — indeed the world.

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