

# China Policy Study Group

# BROADSHEET

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## CHILDREN WITH & WITHOUT A FUTURE

*June 1st is International Children's Day*

In the capitalist societies of the West, the breakdown of 'discipline' among children and youth, and the worsening conditions for them, especially in urban areas, baffle and frighten many. There are many institutions dealing with the young, but obviously they do not represent what children and youth want—the personal care and consideration of the older generations. Nor do they call upon the young to play an independent and intelligent part in their own affairs and to cooperate with teachers and parents and political leaders. The contempt and hatred large numbers of young people show towards the callous and insensitive representatives of the law and order imposed on them is met by hysterical demands for harsher repression to curb their rebellious spirit. In the dead end existence forced on them, the vigorous life within them, in this age of almost unlimited possibilities of development, appears to be a nuisance, a burden. Consequently, more and more boys and girls, as reports indicate, are resorting to crime, including crimes of the crudest violence.

The situation, bad in Britain and much worse in the United States, extends everywhere on the globe where the bourgeoisie or its semi-feudal allies are in power. It can be understood only if we begin by recognising that there is no future for children in a society which is moribund and decaying, one which offers an unending prospect of insoluble problems of industries and shops being shut down, skilled and experienced workers put on the dole, increasingly worthless money and insecurity against violence and want. Young people are paying the price of maintaining in power a ruling class which is bankrupt politically. The possibilities in them to explore, build and pioneer are trapped in the rigidity imposed by the owners of the material resources of the capitalist world — the rigidity of death.

### The working class must take responsibility

Who should take account of this? In Britain it is the working class, and especially its black members, who are the worst victims. Can they and should they not do what needs to be done, instead of trying to escape from the situation by blaming others? Schooled into relying on the bourgeoisie to solve the economic and social problems of capitalism, the working class has not got confidence in itself. Its members are allowing industries that they took decades to build as the foundations of the economy to be closed down. It is a situation in which their children, with no meaningful life in prospect, have shown an alarming tendency to gang together, disrupt normal life in the schools and the community, destroying public property and assaulting people — the most demoralising methods of expressing their frustration and despair.

Within this imperialist society there were and are nations where the situation of children was much worse. In China, too, social decay and breakdown, poverty, tyranny and the bankruptcy of the ruling class resulted in the plight of children

being unspeakably bad. They were exposed to infanticide, bondage, child labour and starvation, without hope of protection from the state or the community. But these conditions led the oppressed to form their own revolutionary Marxist Party, and, following the correct leadership of Mao Tse-tung, to succeed in overthrowing the power of imperialism, feudalism and capitalism. The workers, together with the former poor peasants, are building a socialist, anti-imperialist society.

Has socialism made a real difference for the children? Are there lessons for the working class of capitalist societies? In this connection, we can usefully study the responses of a team of leading U.S. experts on early childhood development who, thoroughly conversant with the situation and problems of children in the U.S. and Europe, and deeply and sincerely concerned, from the bourgeois standpoint, for children, went to China to learn from their observation of children there how the Chinese are tackling the problems which have baffled the West.\* They were deeply impressed by what they saw but at a loss to account for it. They were amazed at the capacity of Chinese children for concentration and self-expression without manifest signs of the aggressiveness so familiar in the West. 'In their homes as in their kindergartens and primary schools, young Chinese children were extraordinarily poised and well-behaved.' 'A friendly, work-oriented atmosphere prevailed, (in the primary schools) the teachers seemed pleased with their children's successes and the children seemed to feel gratified by the teachers' appreciation'. And so on.

How have the Chinese people succeeded where those in capitalist societies have failed so dismally? Twenty-seven years ago the overall literacy rate in China was no more than 15 per cent. Yet illiterate workers and peasants taught themselves to read, and mastered the expertise and techniques required to take initiatives in governing the country, setting up new industrial and agricultural enterprises, developing socialist commerce, banking institutions, building programmes, hospitals and clinics, schools and institutions of higher education. The much better educated workers in the West have no cause to doubt what they can achieve under socialism. Chinese workers and peasants have shown a determination to get a firm grip on the state and the economy and to revolutionize the care and education of the children and youth of China, in order to train them as successors in carrying the revolution to its conclusion. They have seen it as a necessity to train young people as self-reliant workers, peasants and soldiers, solidly united against the bourgeoisie, holding in their hands the power and ability to transform old economic and social relationships. It is the masses of the people themselves, under working class leadership, who have to take the initiatives and to learn how to develop their society in this way.

It is a basic characteristic of socialism to have a deep concern for the correct upbringing of children and their fullest



development. With the provision of homes for workers at very low rents, medical care, maternity, pre-natal and post-natal care for mothers, and the elimination of unemployment and economic anarchy, all parents have a fair chance of providing for the children in their care an environment of economic and emotional security combined with a revolutionary outlook, which they need from their earliest years. If children are to grow to become independent, self-reliant, considerate of others, willing to share things with and work for others, rather than parasitic, self-centred, idle and dominating, continuous personal attention to the development of consciousness of the bitterness of class-society is needed from the time of birth. The lessons workers and peasants learnt in a period of acute class struggle, which revitalised those energies that capitalism crushes or perverts, enabled them to perform the extraordinary feats we note in revolutionaries—they next needed to transmit these lessons to the younger generation. The expectations of the adults must be matched by the love, support and encouragement children get when they learn to feed themselves, wash and dress, clean up, play with others and so on. The American experts were impressed with what they saw—the way parents were supported by teachers, health personnel and the local Revolutionary Committee, the way in which standards set for child behaviour, child-rearing practices and disciplinary measures are matters for discussion and cooperation among parents and grandparents, school and community; and the high levels of competence and good behaviour.

#### **Bourgeois rule the problem, socialism the answer**

The care of the pre-school child is a very good measure of success in the way any society deals with its young. The American experts, in so far as they hoped to learn from a socialist society how to save and perfect their own decaying one, were doing something futile. The Swiss educational psychologist, Piaget, has shown that conditions which give scope for an infant's spontaneous experimental activities and promote the use of language for thought and self-expression are vital for mental and emotional development—development on which the child's future capacity for acquiring skills and forming relationships depends. A lack which retards development at an earlier stage cannot be remedied adequately at a later stage. But despite all this research, very little can be done in a capitalist society to provide children of working mothers, lower-paid workers or irresponsible parents with an emotionally secure and intellectually stimulating background. As studies have shown, the provision of nursery schools falls far short of the demand in Britain; and working class children generally start school some years behind middle class children. Social and welfare workers are unable to put a stop to baby-battering. They are even less able to cope with the social conditions breeding backward children. It is in the interests of the State to prevent people by-passing the bureaucracy, independently taking initiatives to come together and taking over the solution of their local problems. The 'community' *must* remain passive; parents, teachers, education authorities, workers, psychiatrists and social workers cannot combine forces to eradicate the handicaps of their children without subverting the social order. The police and the courts are left to maintain the social order.

It is working class rule which has made the crucial difference in China. For instance, from the moment the expanding economy opened up opportunities for women workers, the Party-backed Women's Federation was active in pressing claims for establishing institutions for pre-school care. As a result a network of nurseries and kindergartens has been established for the care of children from two months to seven years, when they begin primary school in most places. In a socialist society a high standard of service is provided to the community directly (not bureaucratically), by the factories and the production brigades. The care and affection shown by the teachers show that the right people have been chosen for the job. This capitalist

society cannot match. Workers and peasants make decisions as to who should run the schools, how teachers should be selected and trained, the content of the curriculum, and the ways in which they can supervise the education, character-training and politicisation of pupils and students in colleges and universities. Teachers are not only recruited by the representatives of local workers and peasants on the Revolutionary Committee, but are open to criticism by and take directions from them. A half-day off each week for professional study and two hours per week for political study enable teachers to keep up a high standard of efficiency and to advance their political consciousness. In order to accommodate worker parents, nursery teachers in cities sometimes work in eight-hour shifts, round the clock, six days a week, with one month's vacation each year. They can choose to work on overlapping shifts or splits with time out at midday, and are free for discussion or study during children's naps from 11.30 a.m. to 2.30 p.m.

The actual content of the children's education is another aspect. Through joint sessions of study and discussion educational philosophies and programmes are evaluated and circulated. Thus programmes that are successful and enjoyed by the children can be widely used. A significant example was the abundance of dances, songs and skits performed by the children with remarkable skill and confidence. The children's pleasure and involvement in them suggest that they were helping children to come to terms with the inner conflicts arising from among-the-people contradictions. Two song-and-dance sequences observed by the U.S. team as being specially popular make this clear. Other songs and dances depicted railwaymen at work, peasants cutting grain, steel workers producing steel, herdsmen tending flocks, truckers hauling produce for peasants and national minorities. According to Piaget, children use representative play as a means of assimilating into their minds the exciting but not quite comprehensible role played by adults in their community. It is plausible that such performances can be used by children to identify with and regard with respect the role played in their society by their own parents and by other workers and peasants, much as white children in the West enjoy imitating and identifying with cowboys. But alas; in capitalist societies how few workers or farmhands can be heroes to the children. All the attention lavished on the children of workers and peasants in China ensures that they do not start school life emotionally and educationally incapacitated by traumatic pre-school experiences. In the West, the most idealistic teachers and the best educational materials may fail to get a positive response from children, especially the blacks, who grow up in areas of acute social deprivation.

#### **The masses can rely on themselves**

The new way in which the care and development of children and youth have been conceived and organised in China has had far-reaching effects. It has fundamentally altered the relationships among teachers, community and the young. The teaching staff in schools (comprising professionals and workers and peasants assigned for 1½-year periods by factories or communes) form a team which is collectively responsible for the children in its care. It not only helps children to acquire academic and manual skills but combines the functions of teachers, welfare or social worker, child psychologist and much else for the sake of the children and their families. A great deal of trouble is taken in the selection of the men and women who will do this work.

In capitalist societies education and its culmination in a series of public examinations favours the young who are academically inclined and with an educated family background. Children are compelled to spend the best part of every working day (except for vacations) in schools. The older ones who are not academically inclined, and their teachers, are imprisoned within a system, assailed by deep misgivings about the



relevance of the activities they must engage in. These young people feel themselves to be aliens in the narrow world of school life and quite powerless to do anything about it. They can neither opt out nor conform to its requirements and disciplines. It is no wonder that the most disruptive and violent among them succeed in demoralising their peers and elders. Arrogant ruling class responses to anything which threatens their tight control of the mass of children (many examples can be given) only aggravates the situation by antagonising other boys and girls who are normally peaceful and conforming. Those teachers who succeed in maintaining discipline in these circumstances (many do not) no longer solve any problems. The callousness of bourgeois society has not been a secret to the masses; but because they have had for centuries to accept it for themselves they have accepted it for their children. In a society in which a person's social worth is measured solely by what he is able to produce for the bourgeoisie through his labour and by what he can afford to consume, children of working class parents with low incomes and low social status begin at an early age to feel inferior to others. The sense of inferiority in such children is intensified in achievement-oriented schools, whether they are selective or non-selective, grammar or comprehensive. Since such children can derive their self-esteem and identity only through what they perform, it is not surprising that they become aggressive and tense, and feel threatened by the success of any other child. In socially deprived areas, schools can be very terrifying places for children. Every child's hand seems to be against every other child, failure (real or imagined) is an unbearable shame, and nerves are stretched to the point where young children will react violently to the slightest provocation, even to an imagined insult. This has been for a long time the reality, and it will be more so as the ruling class makes the most deprived groups bear the burdens of its continued failures. In a socialist state, even though it began as a desperately poor and economically underdeveloped country, as China is showing, it is bound to be different for the mass of young people. There, top priority is no longer given to intellectual attainment. Children are loved and appreciated for taking initiatives in being helpful, resourceful and outgoing rather than for gaining top grades academically. They do not need to prove themselves in ability tests and competitive examinations. That may be why the children are so happy, do not clamour for attention from adults, and can so naturally respond to one another and to adults. Children with exceptional abilities use

them for the community rather than personal fame by taking part in concerts, dramatic performances, acrobatics, exhibitions of art, craft, model-making, inventions, etc. The wide range of skills and high standard of proficiency in the work done in the Children's Cultural Palaces very much impressed the American experts.

It is the revolutionary masses whose action has given and is giving children and youth a new deal. We have mentioned the leadership of the workers, and the part played by the peasants, the parents, and other adults. The part played by children and boys and girls is no less important. Under the CPC's leadership they have a revolutionary mass organisation. Every school has a socialist organisation within it called the Little Red Soldiers in Primary Schools and Red Guards in Middle Schools. The organisations are set up by the youth league of the local Party branch. Their aim is to draw in as many of the pupils as possible and train them for participation and leadership in socialist transformation. We should look for the origins of the Little Red Soldiers and the Red Guards in the long experience of the workers and peasants in revolutionary struggle. Workers and peasants first learnt to exercise collective power and wisdom and great political strength through membership in labour unions and peasant associations. In these organisations the masses learnt to organise themselves for specific political ends and the success of the Revolution; all the subsequent mass movements are a testimony to what their united efforts could achieve politically. The Little Red Soldiers and the Red Guard Corps are the training ground for children to learn how to organise themselves and explore, in a responsible way, the opportunities such organisations afford. The Corps functions democratically through an executive committee of elected representatives from each platoon (class). The Committee has four sub-committees, responsible for planning and organising activities related to four areas of education vital to building socialism. They are the Political Education Committee, the Productive Labour Committee, the Recreation Committee and the Organisation Committee. The details of the complex and widely varied thinking, planning, organising and action for which young people take responsibility are impressive.

Young people under socialism are not only promised a future which is full of adventure and challenge, but they start building that future from the time they are very young.

*\*Children in China, ed. Kessell. Yale University Press.*

## TEN YEARS OF THE GREAT PROLETARIAN CULTURAL REVOLUTION

*This is the conclusion of the article which started last month.*

### The training of technicians

The Shanghai Machine Tool Factory had remarkable success in training its technicians and engineers from among the workers. After seeing the factory's achievements, Mao Tse-tung issued a directive on 21 July 1968 that all factories should take that road. Factories all over the country set up 'July 21' Workers' Colleges, where workers could train either full-time or part-time. With practical experience in production, their theoretical learning is fast and thorough compared with students in the 17 years of revisionist domination in education, when most learning was confined to books and divorced from practice. These worker-students afterwards return to their production work. The process is continuous and two-way and in line with the socialist principle that labouring people should become intellectuals and vice versa. The result in industrial production has been so striking that it is some time since the 'China experts' have lamented that China lacks technicians and needs the help of foreign experts! Only the Soviet leaders still broad-

cast that China has made no progress, suggesting that since 1960, when the Soviet experts and their blueprints were suddenly withdrawn, China has stagnated. Most important of all, this system gradually eliminates the gap between the mental worker and the manual worker, powerfully repudiating the Confucian heavenly order that 'the scholar rules and the toiler is ruled over'.

### The revolution in education

This revolution is fundamental in depth and enormous in scale, as is attested by many books and numberless articles in different languages. No doubt more will be written when it is fully understood. Its impact on education, whether in developing countries or highly developed countries, is bound to be tremendous. The subject is vast but the key is Mao Tse-tung's principle, 'Education must serve proletarian politics and be combined with productive labour' (1958), vigorously put into effect since the Cultural Revolution.

The old examination system favoured by revisionists has been abolished and replaced by a system, still being tried experi-



mentally up and down the country, which tests the students' ability to analyse and solve problems, rather than to answer questions from text-books. Children formerly went on to higher education straight from senior middle schools. Many were from bourgeois families, and even in the case of working-class and party or cadre families this system tended to create a privileged elite. Now students come from worker, peasant and soldier parents and have already been working for at least two years in the countryside or factory or in the armed forces. Before admission they must be recommended by the peasants or workers who have been guiding them in production and ideological education.

Textbooks and teaching methods are in the process of change, not by decree from the Ministry of Education, but through the work of all those concerned in practice, including the students themselves. They make their own experiments and in due course conferences are held to discuss and summarise the results. In every sense this is a deep-going revolution in education and the practice of true democracy.

Furthermore, all educational institutions run their own farms or vegetable plots, factories or workshops, just as all factories run schools. In fact, 'schools are factories and factories are schools'. More and more educational institutions permanently 'hook up' with factories, while students and workers regularly interchange for training. The new educational system formulated by Mao Tse-tung is a sure step towards eliminating gradually the 'three great differences': between worker and peasant, town and country, mental and manual worker; and it is a powerful attack on an important aspect of the old social superstructure (the world of institutions and ideas) which changes very slowly, and tends to retain bourgeois characteristics long after a socialist revolution in the system of ownership. It is the best way to repudiate the Confucian belief and practice, 'study well in order to become an official', and to combat revisionism and continue the Marxist-Leninist revolution.

#### The masses study Marxist-Leninist classics

It was in the latter part of the Cultural Revolution that the young Red Guards working in factories or countryside began to study Marxist classics. Later, in all kinds of organisations, the masses set up groups to study theory and pass on their knowledge. During the two years (1973-74) of criticising Lin Piao and Confucius, the masses of ordinary people energetically sent their own men and women to study the very difficult Chinese classics in order to understand the historical struggle between the reactionary Confucianists and the progressive Legalists. Many groups, with the help of specialists in ancient history or classics, have compiled booklets on basic theory which are easy to read by the masses. But the masses are not just simple recipients. They cite their own experience or local history when the articles are read to them in the drafting stage, thus contributing to the final version. What a tremendous effort this entailed! The extent of the achievement can only be appreciated by scholars who have studied the Chinese classics and who know how in Chinese history the illiterate masses and the classics were as far apart as earth-bound humans and the moon!

At the end of 1974 Chairman Mao asked:

Why did Lenin speak of exercising dictatorship over the bourgeoisie? This question must be thoroughly understood. Lack of clarity on this question will lead to revisionism. This should be made known to the whole nation.

From then onward, the Chinese people have been studying the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat as formulated by Marx and Lenin. They study it not in the abstract, but in relation to the Chinese situation inherited from history, under which they are actually working and with the purpose of maintaining the dictatorship over the bourgeoisie.

Since the autumn of 1975, the Chinese people have also been studying the novel 'Water Margin' (see BROADSHEET, No. 3,

1976) in order to be able to recognise and attack capitulationism from the standpoint and by means of Marxism-Leninism. The aim is to distinguish true revolutionaries from people who get into the revolutionary camp in order to betray the revolution, capitulate to the enemy and set up a reactionary dictatorship. Such study is necessary to counter-attack such bourgeois elements as those who, in the summer of 1975, tried to negate the achievements of the Cultural Revolution. It is especially noteworthy that the present counter-attack was launched by worker-peasant-soldier students, using a method of struggle which builds on the experience of the Cultural Revolution: speaking out frankly, airing views freely, holding great debates and writing big-character posters (Constitution, article 13). This is the only method for the masses in the movement to liberate themselves, as stated in the fourth of the '16-point' decision of the Communist Party Central Committee concerning the Cultural Revolution, and it is fully compatible with revolutionary discipline. The working-class students developed under the new education system have a high sense of responsibility to the socialist revolution, and increased ability to distinguish between correct and incorrect ideas. All the mass movements since the Cultural Revolution are a continuation of it, developing and deepening it.

No review of the achievements of the Cultural Revolution should ignore the fact that there were inevitably some set-backs; to expect normal production in all fields during the fierce struggle between the two lines and heated confrontation between youthful factions would be an idealist way of looking at the movement. But set against the gains, the set-backs were a small price to pay. The whole population, especially the educated young people, gained invaluable experience from the debates and struggles and long marches; they learned a fundamental lesson about what the masses in the countryside needed and what the class enemy wanted.

As class contradiction will exist for the whole historical period of socialism, such lessons and experiences will have to be repeated in more rectification campaigns in the future. Basically the objective is the liberation of the mind of each man and woman, so that they mature ideologically and change their world outlook. One tangible result of the continuing Cultural Revolution, which led to the revolution in education, is the large number of university and college worker-peasant-soldier graduates who have gone or are going from towns and cities to rural areas in the remotest corners of the country. They have gone, for instance, to Tibet, Chinghai, the Khyang mountains in Heilungkiang, where living conditions are hardest and the need of development greatest. There young people, instead of being turned into an 'intellectual aristocracy', are back to their original status as worker-peasant-soldiers, but with education and political consciousness. By actual involvement in the three revolutionary movements of class struggle, the struggle for production and scientific experiment they fit themselves to guard against revisionism and carry on the revolution.

**HOLIDAYS.** The Parliament Hill office will be closed throughout June.

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