

China Policy Study Group

BROADSHEET

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THE PEOPLE WANT REVOLUTION

A delegation of the China Policy Study Group recently visited China in order to study class struggle at the present stage of China's socialist revolution. We have decided to devote the major part of our work during the coming year to setting out and analysing the fruits of this visit in a series of articles on the general subject of *continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat*. We count on our readers to send us their questions, comments and criticisms to help us do this work as well as possible.

Linking together all the large amount of information we acquired there was a common theme, giving all our impressions a strong sense of unity. This theme is the overwhelming determination of the Chinese people to carry forward the revolution along the course charted by Chairman Mao Tse-tung. The people want and demand to revolutionise the material world and change their old conditions, and this vast pressure from the masses inevitably brings about changes in political life, in the world of institutions and ideas. A very big change began with the overthrow of the four party leaders Wang Hung-wen, Chang Chun-chiao, Chiang Ching and Yao Wen-yuan, known as the 'Gang of Four': this term was coined by Mao Tse-tung himself in his repeated struggles to make them follow a proletarian style of work and give up the sectarian, anti-party course of activity on which they were set.

Until last October, the masses in China did not know that Mao had personally criticised this 'gang', but they had a profound feeling that there was an acute contradiction of some kind. This feeling grew in strength during 1976. Because of this groundswell of opinion, there was widespread understanding of the significance of the Central Committee's action against the Four on October 7th. Millions of people all over the country had various particular or partial experiences of the damage being done by the people who constituted this 'gang'. Now all these particular experiences are falling into shape and revealing an overall pattern: this pattern enables the people to grasp, at a conceptual level, a little more about how representatives of a hostile social class conduct themselves under the socialist system.

Tactics of the Four

In joining in the campaign against the 'Gang of Four' are we acting like the people about whom Mao Tse-tung wrote: 'Today, when the north wind is blowing, they join the "north wind" school; tomorrow, when there is a west wind, they switch to the "west wind" school; afterwards, when the north wind blows again, they switch back to the "north wind" school' (*On the Ten Major Relationships*)? The best answer to this question lies in what we experienced in China, and we will do our best, in writing about it, to make the information as convincing and enlightening to our readers as we ourselves found it over there. All the very many workers, peasants, cadres and intellectuals we spoke with showed a conscious and enthusiastic grasp of Mao Tse-tung's revolutionary line, and just because

they want to carry forward this line they were indignant about what had happened under the Gang's influence.

These former party leaders had a definite tactical scheme: first to create ideological confusion and dislocation in the economic base; then to imply that, because of all this trouble, there must be something wrong with the Party's line and that the established leadership could not run things properly; then to make their own bid for power and change the Party's line. They put forward high-sounding revolutionary slogans to make use of ultra- 'leftist' ideas held by some sincere but mistaken people, but the Four were not themselves 'left' dogmatists who tried to go too far ahead or were divorced from concrete conditions—they were a self-seeking clique who would do anything to advance their goal of seizing power.

There was a bad situation in China over the last couple of years, but there was also a lot of resistance and struggle by the Chinese people. The movements to learn from Tachai in agriculture and Taching in industry, launched by Mao, were great mass, popular movements to consolidate and develop the socialist economic base. In order to persevere in these movements, countless workers and peasants in units up and down the country had to overcome all sorts of interference and sabotage, in other words they had to grasp the class struggle against those now known as the 'Gang of Four'. For this reason the policy of 'grasping the key link and running the country well', put forward recently by Hua Kuo-feng, the Party's new Chairman, fully expresses people's aspirations, conforms with their own experience, and is welcomed and understood by them. Since China is a socialist country, the masses really do feel responsible for running the country; taught by Chairman Mao, they have come to understand that they need to grasp class struggle as the key link in order to do this.

Some reconsiderations

What about the China Policy Study Group's analysis over the past two years or so? Everyone was confused, including the people of China, but actually the average worker in China probably understood things much better than we did. We correctly upheld the view that the famous leaders of the old generation, especially Chou En-lai, were outstanding and exemplary proletarian revolutionaries. In this, our point of view was identical with that of the broad masses of China, whose esteem for Chou is just an expression of their enthusiasm for the proletarian revolution itself. Some members of our Group correctly pointed out that the criticism of Teng Hsiao-ping was being used as a way of attacking Chou En-lai, but on the whole we went along with the anti-Teng movement. We could not be blamed too much for doing so, because the Chinese media, heavily influenced by members of the 'Gang of Four', contrived to give the impression that Mao Tse-tung was personally backing all aspects of that campaign.

Our opinion now is that Teng Hsiao-ping was not setting out to intrigue and conspire (unlike the 'Gang of Four' themselves),

but he made some serious mistakes. The demand of the masses and of the objective situation was that class struggle should be grasped as the key link: for this reason Mao himself criticised the slogan of 'taking the three directives as the key link' (see BROADSHEET, May 1976). Whenever comrades follow a wrong line this benefits the class enemy, and this case was no exception. Teng's error played into the hands of Wang, Chang, Chiang and Yao, and they made use of the criticism campaign to pretend that he was only one case out of a whole class of people inside the Party who had betrayed socialism: the Gang's aim was to overthrow a whole lot of cadres with good revolutionary records who stood in the way of their bid for power.

Our Group definitely showed a lack of judgment regarding the theories put forward by the 'Gang of Four', especially the article by Chang Chun-chiao 'On Exercising All-round Dictatorship over the Bourgeoisie', published in *Red Flag* of April 1975 (available in English as a separate pamphlet and also translated in *Peking Review*). It always sounds fine to have a good bash at the bourgeoisie, particularly when one is living in a country under the bourgeoisie's control. But in China most spheres of national life are, on the whole, under the control of the proletariat. The 'Gang of Four' tried to deny this, and aimed to overthrow the leadership in many units where it was in fact proletarian. We should certainly have perceived that there was something wrong with this!

The notion of exercising all-round dictatorship over the bourgeoisie as put forward by Chang Chun-chiao does not make much sense, either in China or anywhere else. The bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie always makes up quite a large group of people. In China there are the former middle peasants, and small production always threatens to engender fresh groups with a bourgeois outlook; as Chairman Mao pointed out in 1974, the existence of bourgeois right in the system of distribution means that a bourgeoisie can emerge among some cadres and even among members of the proletariat. But it would be wrong and reactionary to make whole large sections of the peasantry, intellectuals, cadres and the proletariat itself *targets* of the

dictatorship of the proletariat, to exercise dictatorship over them—this would actually develop into a fascist-type dictatorship.

Only the proletariat has a future in the modern world. This is because 'the other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product' (*The Communist Manifesto*). Mao Tse-tung said: 'though small in number, the working class, and it alone, has a great future. The other classes are all classes in transition, through which they must go in the direction of the working class.' In any country, the proletariat has to unite the vast majority of the people around itself and lead them forward: in transforming the objective world, all classes are themselves transformed, a process which takes several generations and will eventually lead to the abolition of classes and arrival at communist society. In order to reach this goal, it is indispensable to maintain, throughout the long transitional period, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The target of this dictatorship is a very small handful of diehard reactionaries and their political representatives within the Party of the proletariat.

In a country like Britain there is quite a large proletariat and there is hardly any peasantry. But we have a large petty bourgeoisie consisting of small proprietors, self-employed people, white-collar workers and intellectuals. Quite obviously these people are not the targets of the proletarian revolution and when this revolution has taken place they will not be made targets of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletariat must lead them and transform them step by step over a long period.

In developing their own ideological line, sometimes described by their followers as 'Chang Chun-chiao Thought' or the 'fourth milestone' in the development of Marxism-Leninism, the 'Gang of Four' in China did not have much consistency. But their overall purpose was to overthrow Mao Tse-tung Thought. Hence it is a good thing for people, not just in China but in all countries, that a movement is now underway to set things right.

INDIA'S PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

After thirty years of misrule, India's Congress Party has been defeated in general elections. The party that was groomed by the British colonialists to take over where they left off in 1947 is in disarray. The Indian people have rejected the Emergency Raj that was imposed on them in June 1975, together with all those individuals most closely connected with its brutalities (only 5 cabinet ministers out of more than 40 retained their seats). The total rout of Congress Party candidates in those areas where the fascistic measures politely described as the 'excesses' of the Emergency were most directly felt is a clear expression of the intensity of people's hatred of ruling class tyranny.

But the change in government falls far, far short of being the 'bloodless revolution' or 'second independence' that some of the Janata Party's supporters proclaim it to be. Despite the popular support that has been afforded to it as an alternative to Indira Gandhi's dictatorial regime, the Janata (People's) government is no more a true government of the people than was its predecessor. Many of the leading figures in the new administration have served in previous Congress governments. Some of them have only recently crossed the floor. The new Prime Minister himself parted company in 1969 with the section of the Congress led by Indira Gandhi as a result of disputes that were basically over the question of how best to contain communism and to preserve the class rule of big landowners and capitalists in India. An examination of the past histories of some of his present colleagues reveals a distasteful series of conspiracies, defections, political manoeuvring and corruption that hardly inspires confidence in their future dealings or in their role as champions of the people now.

Nevertheless, though the leopards cannot change their spots, at present they are certainly trying to whitewash them. It is clear that the type of bourgeois dictatorship exercised since June 1975 failed either to resolve India's economic problems or to bully the working people of India into relinquishing their struggles for a better life. The new government is obviously going to try to make the system work in a different way—through bourgeois liberalism. And it has to be admitted that there has already been a marked improvement in the general climate. For the first time since 1971, there is no state of emergency in India. Press censorship and the bans on strikes and meetings have been lifted. Preventive detention legislation has been suspended. Workers have already intensified their struggles for the restoration of bonuses and other allowances they were deprived of during the Emergency. The new government is trying to meet them with negotiations and concessions rather than the outright repression typical of Congress regimes since long before June 1975.

Still it would be naive to think that the ruling class will destroy itself to help the poor and oppressed. It is not being cynical to predict that the present liberal honeymoon will be shortlived. A government whose agricultural minister is a big landowner, whose Home Minister is a chieftain of the rich farmers' lobby, is unlikely to carry out even such basic measures as land reform. Inevitably, the Indian people's struggles for emancipation will continue and, equally inevitably, will be met with repression.

Though the Janata government has promised enquiries into the main abuses of power during the Emergency and punishment of the chief persons responsible, apart from a few token

moves such as the setting up of enquiry commissions and the withdrawal of Sanjay Gandhi's passport, little has been done so far. This, coupled with the government's extreme hesitation in releasing revolutionaries who have been in prison for up to seven years without trial (despite election campaign assurances that it would release all political prisoners), indicates clearly that it feels more threatened by the revolutionary left than by the Congress Party. If the remaining prisoners are released, it will almost certainly be as a result of the pressure exerted by the increasingly strong civil rights movement that is emerging in different parts of India, supported by progressive people abroad.

Unsolved problems

Despite assurances that it would cut down on the police and paramilitary forces whose growth in power and numbers in recent years has turned India into a police state, the new government has yet to dismantle the armed police camps which, since the early seventies, have surrounded the areas of militant peasant struggles where lands have been seized and distributed and attempts made at setting up revolutionary base areas. Though the Marxist-Leninist movement has never recovered from the setbacks of the early seventies, it has continued trying to mobilize the people to carry out agrarian revolution, which it sees as a necessary precondition for socialist revolution. Though the new Home Minister has recognized the existence of socio-economic problems in the countryside, and has met some of the Marxist-Leninist leaders, both sides are likely to find that it is impossible for the lion to lie down with the lamb.

Internationally, the Janata government has already made it quite clear that it intends to pursue the same old path of dependence on 'aid' and collaboration with imperialist powers. The USA are bound to be viewed with favour, since every one of the Janata's constituent parties has a pro-US history. Morarji Desai himself even supported American aggression in Vietnam. Already under the Emergency, US interest in India had revived, and the World Bank has recently come up with very substantial loans. British, West German and other western industrialists also have wasted no time in holding talks and promising investments.

The defeat of the Congress Party was a well-deserved slap in the face to the Soviet Union, its chief champion abroad, which had quite shamelessly supported the blatant cruelties of the Emergency as 'anti-fascist' measures (how the forced sterilisation of over 6 million people could contribute to the anti-fascist struggle is a matter beyond comprehension). However, it has recovered lost ground much faster than its local mouthpiece, the 'Communist' Party of India, which managed to retain only 7 of its 23 parliamentary seats, a fitting come-uppance for its treacherous collaboration with Indira Gandhi's dictatorial regime. Hardly had the new government taken their seats in Delhi when Gromyko was sent scurrying to visit them. Considering that Moscow had been denouncing the very same people he talked to as reactionaries only a few weeks before, he must have come away well satisfied. New 'soft' loans were promised, the Indo-Soviet 'Friendship' Treaty remains in force as a useful aid to isolate China, and he found that 'Indo-Soviet relationships are so deeply rooted that they cannot be uprooted'. Perhaps more significant, the Soviet Defence Minister sent a message to his new counterpart in Delhi anticipating increased 'military co-operation'.

All in all, India's change of government marks a change in form, whilst the fundamental content remains the same. However, the present relaxation presents an opportunity for mobilization of large sections of the working people before increased and more sophisticated forms of repression return. It is up to the revolutionary forces to make the best use of this chance. The next few years may well see great political upheavals, leading to a realignment of forces.

M.K.T.

ART AS CELEBRATION

The recent exhibitions of peasant paintings from Huhsien, and the showing of the films of Joris Ivens and "The East is Red", have given us a welcome opportunity to study what the arts can contribute to a revolutionary society. Such works are considered to be important weapons in the struggle towards socialism. It is significant that the writer Lu Hsun is honoured as a revolutionary pioneer, and the poems of Mao Tse-tung himself played an important part in his life as a revolutionary leader and teacher. One present criticism of the "Gang of Four" concerns their malign influence on the arts and the media.

The Huhsien peasants would be called "amateurs" in capitalist countries. So they are! They feel artistic expression to be necessary to the quality of their lives and work; they do not produce commodities in artistic form in order to sell them and make money for themselves. Criticisms from friends and fellow-workers lead to improvements in form, technique, and content, and are not resented as interference with the freedom of the artist, nor as pouring cold water on the creative fire. On the contrary; they are a practical illustration of Marx's thesis that it is not the consciousness of men that determines social being, but social being that determines consciousness.

Contrasts: hope and contempt

When we look at these paintings, we cannot fail to be struck by their liveliness and optimism, expressing not only the joy in labour that the artists feel, but also their deep belief that their society is good today, and offers them a bright future. Work, for them, is no longer back-breaking toil for a bare subsistence, but a collective activity which, like their art, they enjoy in the company of their comrades. William Morris, in his book *On Art and Socialism*, said that the aim of socialist art is "to destroy the curse of labour by making work the pleasurable satisfaction of our impulse towards energy, and giving that energy hope of producing worth its exercise".

The celebration of daily work in the paintings, and which the Ivens films so accurately reflect, is in sharp contrast with much of what passes for art in capitalist societies. In capitalist societies the chief characteristic is corruption and violence in all their forms, dehumanising and blunting the senses rather than uplifting them. Whatever merit the few may see in the Tate gallery's exhibition of bricks and blankets, and the exhibition of pornography at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, they had nothing constructive to say about changing society. They displayed an apparent contempt for society but were a reflection of our society as it is: the "creators" of such work see the life of the people as either purposeless or disgusting. In typical bourgeois fashion, their admirers claim that they represent the freedom of the artist to explore and express new forms and realms of consciousness. Of course exploration is necessary; socialist society itself is a new form of social relationship, and its art would not be socialist if it made no advance in form and content—the contradiction which challenges every would-be artist. The great flowering of experimental works in Russia following the October Revolution sprang from the creative energy which it released and the promise of a young and vigorous society. The degeneration of that society into social imperialism is reflected in both the present "monumental" art, glorifying the State rather than the people, and in the aping of modern Western art.

Serving the people

For the bourgeoisie, individual freedom means freedom from "interference" by the State; likewise, for the bourgeois artist, in any medium, freedom means no restriction on his freedom of expression, "doing his own thing". Lenin saw through this sham: "the freedom of the bourgeois writers, artists or actresses is simply masked (or hypocritically masked) dependence on the moneybag". Socialist art, on the other hand, is of

the people, and derives its inspiration from wholehearted partisanship. Art is not above class and politics. In his talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art, Mao Tse-tung emphasised that all art is class-based: "The first problem is: literature and art for whom?" and again, "We must take the class stand of the proletariat, and not that of the petty bourgeoisie. Today, writers who cling to an individual, petty-bourgeois stand cannot truly serve the masses of revolutionary workers, peasants and soldiers".

In bourgeois circles, this notion of "serving the masses" probably arouses more hostility than any other, because it implies that the artist has to tailor his ideas to suit others, and not himself alone. Art has no such purpose, it is claimed; Art is for Art's sake, and the sole duty of an artist is to develop a high level of technical skill in order to express his own personality through some medium: verse, paint, sound, and so on. On this view, the artist stands apart from society, and his inspiration comes, not from his social awareness but from some divine spark which is unique to him. This gives him the right to say that what he produces is Art.

The "freedom" fallacy

The whole history of the arts shows this to be a fallacy. The reason why every human society has produced works of art is that the arts fulfil a necessary social function. They are at their best when linked to, and inspired by, the progressive forces at work in society. What is distinctive in man comes from active association with other human beings, from experience in the conquest of nature to produce the means of life, from the invention of new technologies, and from the new forms of social relationship which result. In every epoch when such new forms have been established, there has been a surge of artistic output, reflecting the breaking away from old relations which had ceased to stimulate and become instead a shackle on the artistic imagination. The Greek city state of Athens, the Italian cities of the Renaissance, Elizabethan England, revolutionary France, all produced groups of artists who not only portrayed the spirit of their age, but made creative advances in the techniques of their arts. The works of Aeschylus, Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Goethe, Beethoven, Balzac and a host of others, have endured because they spring from perception of new class needs. They were of their own time and class, but are not limited to them because they represent features which laid the foundations for future progress. The bourgeois revolution, for example, was built on the idea of respect for the rights of citizens against the "divine right" of kings; in the arts, it meant freedom from the restrictive patronage of the church and feudal lord, saints were replaced by respectable burghers.

We do not go to works like these for factual information. Shakespeare's notions of history are far from being a reliable guide! What they provide is insight into the human condition: how we act in the face of contradictions in every area of nature and of human experience.

Thus the arts do more than merely describe the way things are. They have an appeal which is more than local and personal because they are the imaginative projection of human intentions and aspirations. They can help us understand what is wrong with our times, and can portray an ideal to help us understand it and inspire us with the will to change it. As Marx pointed out, what distinguishes the worst of architects from the best of bees is that the architect can create a structure in his imagination before ever a brick is laid. Through the power of the artistic imagination, we are brought to a wider and clearer view of life, and so are able to take the actions necessary to improve control over our destinies. Freedom, for the artist, lies in the recognition of his responsibility to us, his "public"; he communicates to us his vision, which may be clearer than ours. Tolstoy said that a work of art is finished when it has been brought to such clarity that it communicates itself to

others and evokes in them the same feeling that the artist experienced while creating it. If, then, there is no revolutionary feeling in the artist, there will be no revolutionary fervour aroused in the public, no matter how skilful his technique may be. The much admired work of L. S. Lowry, despite its descriptive power, often portrays a negative side of working class life. His people, unlike the people in the Huhkien paintings, look aimless and forlorn, and there is no hint of class struggle.

Form and Content

The struggle to resolve the basic contradiction between technique and subject, form and content, is a constant preoccupation of the artist. For many Western artists form completely overshadows content; for the socialist artist content comes first and governs form. Content includes all the rich variety of life, nature, history, momentous events, moving experiences. In the struggle towards socialism, the masses seek inspiration and new understanding in all these areas. Gorky once reported a conversation with Lenin on the new public for the arts after the October Revolution. "I say all it wants is heroic drama. But Vladimir Ilyich insists that it wants lyricism too, and Chekov, and the truth of everyday life". This is the aim of socialist realism, despised by bourgeois critics as mere uneducated description. Certainly, there is a danger here. Mastery of tools and materials does not guarantee success, and some works ascribed to socialist realism show that it can be massively unappealing, particularly "monumental" art, when no more than imitative. The Huhkien paintings, by contrast, show that even relatively unschooled peasants can achieve a powerful impact.

In an important passage in his *Talks at the Yen-an Forum*, Mao Tse-tung discusses standards. If art must become popular, does this mean lower standards than those of great artists of the past? Of course not, said Mao. Popularisation and raising of standards are not enemies. "We must on no account reject the legacies of the ancients and the foreigners or refuse to learn from them, even though they are the works of the feudal or bourgeois classes. But taking over legacies and using them as examples must never replace our own creative works; nothing can do that".

The search must go on for new forms best expressing a socialist content. Capitalist society uses all the power of propaganda media to promote art which is degrading and nihilistic. "Pop art" struggles to escape from the limitations of traditional forms but leads nowhere because this new "artistic freedom" has imposed new limitations. Abstract art, which began as exploration into the nature of form, is sterile.

In the Huhkien paintings, we see a revolutionary development in Chinese art with the rise of a new kind of artist from among the people. For us they are a challenge and a lesson we should take to heart. Art plays a vital role in the evolution of society, and will yet provide us with a powerful weapon in our own struggle towards the great goal of socialism.

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