

China Policy Study Group

# BROADSHEET

## PROBLEMS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION AND SOCIALISM

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### CPC RESOLUTION

**H**AD Mao Zedong's policies been reversed by his successors (as so many Western pundits have claimed) he could hardly have received such a remarkable tribute as that contained in the Resolution passed by the Sixth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on 27th June.

The Resolution (to which we shall return in our next issue) is a detailed summing-up of the whole history of the CPC since its foundation in 1921 and it abounds with examples of Mao's correct policies as well as of his erroneous ones. Both are intended as guides to the Party in its future work.

The conclusion to which the Resolution comes is that Mao's merits are primary and his mistakes secondary. He is assessed as 'a great Marxist and a great proletarian revolutionary strategist and theorist'. In addition to the guidance he gave to the Chinese revolution and people it is considered that he made major contributions to the liberation of oppressed nations and to the progress of mankind.

In the sphere of foreign policy the line with which

Mao has been identified has on the whole been followed consistently ever since 1949 and events have vindicated it. It is salutary, for instance, to look back at the celebrated interview with Anna Louise Strong in 1946, concerning the possibility of an attack by the US on the Soviet Union. Mao pointed out that such an attack was impossible before the US had subjugated the 'intermediate zone' lying between the two countries.

Since the interview there has been a reversal of roles. It is the USSR which now dreams of world domination.

Afghanistan is the latest in a long list of Soviet attacks on the 'intermediate zone'. Mao held that such aggression could be resisted only by the unity of the nations at risk and it is significant that the nations of the EEC (the most important part of the Second World) realised the threat which the Soviet Union poses to them and despatched the Carrington mission to Moscow. It is noteworthy that the mission was an initiative independent of the US. European leaders are beginning to stand on their own feet. China will certainly do all it can, as it did in Mao's lifetime, to encourage and support them.

## CHINA ASKS: WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

**A**T various times and places in the mid-20th century socialism has been seen as a dogma rather than a means of emancipation. To put the same point another way, the idea of socialism had proved immensely potent in overthrowing the former oppressors and laying an economic base freed of the old forms of exploitation; potent also in generating a concerted drive for development and social construction; but it had yet to be shown that a socialist system could continue to work efficiently after the initial impetus subsided and would not go on to create new hardships of its own.

This begs several questions about quality of leadership, vigilance to resist compromise, the need for education in the new values of a new system. But it still leaves the central question unanswered. Can the system work satisfactorily over a longer time-span? If so what adjustments have to be made to prevent degeneration?

The more a system depends on central direction the greater the danger of bureaucracy. Paradoxically, the more streamlined and effective the administration, very often the less sensitive or scrupulous the administrators. Whether they be agents of proletarian or bourgeois power there is still no gainsaying that 'All power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'.

It might, for example, be a tragic mistake to try to dispense with material incentives and rely on the social

incentive of serving public policy, sometimes a euphemism for currying favour with conservative petty officials. If material incentives are admissible so are diverse rates of remuneration for different skills. Depending on the level of economic development they start from, different countries embarking on a socialist path are bound to adopt different routes. A country with a population mainly engaged in farming and a relatively small industrial working class must put more emphasis on land reform and methods of collectivisation suitable for the countryside. One where the preponderant problem is urban poverty created by gross disparity of income will move naturally across the board to a more uniform system of employment and remuneration. If there has been history of producers' or consumers' co-operatives the new structure will make use of that form. If part of the entrepreneurial class have been allies of the socialists during their takeover that too will be reflected in the economic pattern that emerges.

In the early fifties there were signs that China might be forced into a mould constructed on East European lines. But with the sturdy growth of the higher-stage co-operatives and their coalescence into People's Communes Chinese flexibility was reasserted. An equally telling blow for independent initiatives at the lower and intermediate levels of industry followed in the Great Leap Forward.

Yet those who were never weaned from the Russian model stayed to fight again and one result has been a confusion of counsels ever since, heightened from the mid-seventies by the loss of leaders who epitomised the course of development of the Chinese revolution.

China has now become a university of socialist theory, with the established seers politely acknowledged but diverse other voices proclaiming variants and alternatives.

Those who think that the Russians are broadly on the right lines, or that everything was fine in China up to the Cultural Revolution, do not relish this medley of exposition. For they have greater confidence than most Chinese theorists (including, of course, Mao) that they already know the route to socialism, or at the least can always tell when people are *not* keeping to the route.

The debate about centralism versus devolution; state ownership versus collective ownership (i.e. communes and various kinds of co-operatives); and about whether a private or joint state-private sector has a legitimate place in a socialist system, leads to a more fundamental debate about the essential characteristics of the system itself. The reflection of this can be seen most clearly in theoretical articles in the Party press, notably an article on the Nature of Chinese Society in the May issue of *Honqqi (Red Flag)* by the Vice-president of the Central Committee's Party School. In fact the article is a call for a return to the rudimentary definition of socialism, and it leads with a strong card:

1. Lenin said socialism means public ownership of the means of production plus the principle of distribution according to work.

The successive stages of the argument are:

2. The *form* of public ownership of the means of production varies from one country to another and from one stage of development to another, but the test of whether society is socialist does not depend on the form but on whether public ownership occupies the dominant position in industry, agriculture and commerce.
3. The economy is still a commodity economy except that *labour power has ceased to be a commodity* and there is no labour market. Since the public sector is preponderant, however, not just the management of the economy but its proportionate development are planned.
4. The principle of 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his work' does not create real equality among the members of society but is appropriate to the stage of socialism, because at that stage there are still shortages and distribution according to need is not yet a possibility.

All the personnel of all the organs of a socialist state are servants of the people as a whole, their duty is to serve the people without qualification, and while not all productive units may be organs of the state, all branches of the superstructure are, and they cannot shelter behind accountability to any group other than the people as a whole.

Such a definition of socialism may be loose, but it is certainly not dogmatic. It lays down no doctrinal dividing lines relying on special authority. It sidesteps controversy about how large an unsocialised sector can be accommodated, or what forms it may take, simply saying that public ownership must predominate in industry, agriculture and commerce. In China the predominance is overwhelming but this Chinese definition would take in societies with a much more mixed economy, providing the economy were planned and distribution regulated according to work alone.<sup>1</sup> The definition rules out neither tight centralisation nor drastic decentralisation and would thus embrace models suitable only for small countries with little tradition of local responsibility as well as complex systems like China's with parallel economic responsibility at central, municipal, county and commune level. Those who maintain that during the period of socialist construction a commune form of organisation is more likely to foster socialist attitudes than

a centrally orientated structure could equally support this definition.

Does such an all-embracing definition shirk too many questions? The Chinese view is that no country is entitled to point to one model and say that, either with or without modification, it is the pattern to be followed. Least of all will the Chinese put forward their own system as a pattern at present, first because they are by no means theoretically agreed on what it is, or should be, and secondly because they *are* agreed that without further experience they cannot be sure it will work satisfactorily when the emphasis shifts from construction to modernisation, from feeding industry to satisfying the consumer, from making people conscious of the gains of the revolution to making the authorities conscious of the wishes of the people.

The concept of socialist society may therefore be more catholic in China than in some countries but that at least disposes of the charge that China's criterion of socialism is unduly exclusive. Other than the five social criteria listed few requirements would evidently be insisted on. An exception is the principle of extending socialist attitudes to the field of foreign relations. In a brief reference the article comes nearer to a sharp line of demarcation here than when dealing with the economic structure. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are cited but not without their present-day implication—*neither yielding to nor seeking hegemony*. Hegemonism beyond one's borders is bracketed with oppression of national minorities within, so that a country practising either 'would cease to be a real socialist country'.

There is more in the article than a restatement of the nature of socialist society. Reviewing the various stages leading to socialism it examines again the argument that socialist construction is impracticable in a country that has not gone through the previous stages of capitalism. The thesis is not dismissed in a high-handed way, indeed it is conceded that some people are now urging it afresh and contending that China would do well to 'go back and develop capitalism'. Instead of denouncing them for harbouring such misgivings the writer patiently puts the contrary case, first on Marxist theoretical grounds and then by cogently analysing the actual conditions and experience of China. The treatment commands attention for preferring a reasoned to a dogmatic approach. Authority is cited, but the most telling passage has a strong pragmatic appeal:

The process of historical development follows an objective law of its own, and whether or not a country must pass through the stage of an independently developed capitalism does not depend on the will of man... After the founding of the People's Republic we were able to make the transition to socialism by means of socialist transformation. Why then shouldn't we make full use of the advantages of the socialist system to develop our social productive forces? ... why should we go through a stage of capitalist development which would only bring capitalist exploitation and suffering to the people? ... To have completed socialist transformation so smoothly in a big, economically backward, populous country was a great pioneering feat in world history... Today, after 30 years of socialism, it would obviously be very ridiculous to turn around and develop capitalism.

It is hard to brush this aside altogether as special pleading. The analysis which follows of the most serious mistakes made in the course of socialist construction in China is different from what would have been written five years ago, but again it cannot be dismissed entirely as special pleading. For example, one of the effects of the first mistake—exaggerating the class struggle in socialist society—was the undeniable distortion of a primary feature of socialism: eliminating the differences between mental and manual work by 'turning mental workers into manual labourers instead of encouraging manual workers to master intellectual work'. A result of

the second—over-anxiety to transform the relations of production—was to put the relations of production seriously out of phase with the productive forces, first in the country then in the towns. The third—impatience for results in economic construction—led to the recent crisis of excessive accumulation and over-extended capital construction at the expense of living standards.

Not only business men greedy for orders, or Soviet propagandists anxious to belittle Chinese performance, but the best-meaning socialists looking for evidence that China is on an upward gradient have bitterly lamented the cutbacks of the last two years and the accompanying leadership changes. Yet it is no part of socialism to persist in a mistake when you can recognise it. A leading Chinese business man visiting London recently said 'China won't go in for many of the big construction schemes; though she could. She could do so, but the

result would be unbalanced budgets and inflation'.

In social terms the result would be renewed stagnation of the people's living standards. That is now probably not going to be the nature of Chinese society in the next two decades.

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1 If you say no in all circumstances to the licensing of privately-run establishments in the service trades, or small-scale co-operative production within limits defined by regulation, you may increase the burden on public agencies more than commensurately, with the result that the total flow of goods and services is reduced. You will be nearer to the basic socialist blueprint but at the cost of a somewhat reduced standard of living. Experience outside China suggests that when the slow rate of increase in living standards becomes a widely-felt grievance the licensing of a limited number of private operators in chosen sectors may be the best way of forestalling demands to turn sectors over to private enterprise entirely.

## ABOUT SOONG CHING LING

THE long life of Soong Ching Ling was one of close and continuous involvement in the tumultuous changes in her country and in the lives of her warmly-loved compatriots. Born in 1890, daughter of the wealthy national-capitalist Soong family and with a university education in the United States, she grew up with personal knowledge of capitalist society and the benefits enjoyed by the top dogs. She became aware of the contrast between their condition and that of the down-trodden poor. Her qualities of understanding, independence, and courage were shown when, as a young adult, she broke away from her family, to become involved in the difficult people's struggles during the following years. The contrast between her life and that of her family was emphasised by the marriage of one sister, Mei-ling, to Chiang Kai-shek and of another to the banker and financier of the 1911 Republic, H. H. Kung. At liberation some of her family fled to Taiwan and some to the United States; she remained in her own country, to struggle together with the people.

When the newly-created Chinese Republic was under attack from its domestic and foreign enemies, the 20-year-old university graduate threw herself into the struggle for a genuinely democratic China. Her political mentor, Sun Yatsen, came increasingly to rely on her. When Yuan Shih-kai seized power, and Sun had to go into exile in Japan, she joined him. In 1915 they married.

There was a new ferment of political and social change in China, and this young revolutionary was stirred, and formed, by the same forces that gave rise to the May Fourth movement of 1919, the radicalisation of the working class and the poor peasantry, the formation of the CPC in July 1921, the worldwide struggle against fascism and imperialism, liberation and socialist revolution in China.

When Sun died in 1925, and his chief lieutenant Liao Chungkai was assassinated, Soong Ching Ling's leadership of the revolutionary wing of the Kuomintang became crucial. What were termed Sun's 'Three Policies' were the political basis of the Guangzhou regime in 1924 and the 1924-27 revolution, which ended in the disaster of Chiang Kai-shek's treachery and coup d'état. Soong Ching Ling by her words and actions exposed the falseness of Chiang's claim to be Sun's successor, his collusion with all the enemies of the Chinese people, the tyranny and the torture, and his bogus 'New Life' movement. The interests of the working class and of the rural proletariat; the revolutionary alliance of democratic and CPC members; and friendship with the USSR: these,

the 'Three Policies', she continually reaffirmed while working untiringly to bring about the new China.

After Chiang's 1927 massacre she played a leading part in the formation of the Left KMT. The following are extracts from an article she published in Shanghai in 1932—*The Tasks of the China League for Civil Rights*. Though most of China was in the grip of an extremely reactionary imperialist-backed regime, established by terror and repression she, together with Lu Xun and others, organised the League openly. Such courage and resourcefulness is rare; this woman was indeed unusual.

Let us consider the question of democratic rights of the people. Enemies and critics of the League have raised a number of hypothetical objections to our activities and principles. Democratic rights cannot be separated from the struggles shaking the world as well as China, but are, on the contrary, bound up with and part and parcel of these struggles...

Some people may ask: "Why are you fighting for democratic rights in China if you do not believe in bourgeois democracy?" The answer is very simple. First, there is a distinction between formal bourgeois democracy and the democratic rights of the masses. For the latter the workers and peasants will always fight because the right of free speech, press and assembly, and the right of organisation, once attained, give a more favourable basis for the development of the struggle of the masses for their final liberation. In this struggle we must be with the masses of China, warning them not to put their faith in the paper promises of the Kuomintang, such as the newly-proposed "civil right" of the new Constitution, but to rely solely on their own efforts and power...

Those who think that they can prolong their rule of bloody suppression of the people indefinitely, are mistaken. The masses must struggle for their fundamental rights. This struggle will increase, will sweep China, will make it powerful and unite it. And this will answer the last question of our enemies: "Do you advocate revolution?" We are not a revolutionary party. Our task is more limited. But we live in a revolutionary epoch. One-sixth of the world has already accomplished the revolution, and the masses in the old capitalist countries are gathering for the great battles. The colonial peoples must mass their strength to break the chains of imperialist domination. China, seemingly helpless today, will free itself tomorrow. The imperialist war against China is a fact. But the revolutionary situation is also a fact. Either the revolution will triumph in China, or imperialism will conquer and dismember China. There is no alternative. Believing in the final victory of the masses in China, I am sure that the revolution will establish its own right, establish the unity, independence and integrity of China, and the right of the masses to govern themselves. And my conception of the China League for Civil Rights is that it is one of the instruments which will move us towards this goal.

Her devotion to her country and people were expressed even more vigorously after the Japanese invasion in

the thirties, when she played a prominent part in the formation of the Chinese People's Committee for Armed Self-Defence.

She was deeply concerned with the world peace movement as a member of the World Peace Council, receiving the Stalin Peace Prize for 1950. She led the Chinese delegation to the Congress of Peoples for Peace and was Chairman of the Peace Liaison Committee for the Asian and Pacific Regions.

At the first National People's Congress she was appointed a Vice-Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, while at the same time being Vice-Chairman of the recently formed Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

The long span of her life extended from old China to the first Chinese Republic and thence to the People's Republic. Throughout all this period her work was exemplary. The shape of the world she worked to build was eloquently expressed in her speech to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 1949, which ended:

China's masses, in their revolutionary struggle, are welded to the people's governments and forces in every part of the globe. Together they have swung the balance of history. This is a mighty force in the hands of millions, and the units are workers, peasants and intellectuals. They are dedicated to prevent the destruction of civilisation. They will exert every ounce of energy to insure that the common people everywhere get their due from life.

This is to say that the struggle does not end until every hovel has been rebuilt into a decent house; until the products of the earth are within easy purchase; until products from the factories are returned in equal amount to the work exerted; until every family can have complete medical care from the cradle to the grave. When these necessities are equally at hand for everyone, regardless of race, colour, creed and residence in this world, then we can say we have reached our goal.

Soong Ching Ling did not live to join in the forthcoming celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the 1911 Revolution. But those who observe that important anniversary on 10th October cannot but be thankful for what China, and indeed the world, owes her.

## CORRESPONDENCE

*A Subscriber writes:*

THE article by Jitendra Mohan in the June/July BROADSHEET serves a useful purpose in providing a background to any discussion of 'revisionism' and a guide to important source materials. It also shows clearly how accusation and counter-accusation have taken the place of debate over fundamentals, and one has to ask, Is it worth pursuing that sort of discussion? Can 'revisionism' be identified at all and discussed in a serious, scientific manner?

Marx did not claim to have discovered the existence of class struggle and its motive power in changing the course of history, but to have revealed that the nature of classes, and the contradictions between them, were determined by the historical stage in the development of the forces of production—the ways in which we seek the means of living. The relations of production are the means of consciously organising the forces of production in order to secure the maximum benefit for those who control them. History is the history of class struggle because at each stage, one powerful section of the community has controlled these forces and thus been able to impose its own will, to control decision-making on questions affecting everyone. Sometimes, students of society came to understand how the interplay of forces and relations of production worked, and to provide at least partial explanations; the ideas of Adam Smith and Ricardo helped Marx to complete his own analysis.

Marxism is a scientific approach to the explanation of human history, by means of which we can come to understand how human affairs develop, and to order them better. Science is the systematic investigation of various phenomena to discover their

material content, their parts and their internal relations or structure, and the ways in which each phenomenon affects others in the environment. We investigate several instances of the same thing to see whether we can make any statements about these and similar events *as a category*, that is, we make generalisations. The purpose is to increase our own control over events by means of predictive power. 'This class of things behaves like this and will continue to do so unless the conditions change.' New tendencies emerge, through the internal contradictions which always exist in things and which provide the motive power for their growth, or through new contradictions due to influences in the environment which change the relations between the two. These are the basic elements of the dialectic: unity of opposites, change and development due to the interplay of contradictions, leading towards a superior form of organisation.

Denial of these fundamental processes may constitute one form of revisionism—for example, the ideas of Kautsky and the Eurocommunists that socialism can come about as a peaceful development of parliamentary government without a revolutionary change in the internal relations of society, or the claim that society reaches stability once a socialist form of state has been established.

A problem arises from these premises for those who wish to use the science of Marxism to understand how to manipulate economic laws and consciously organise the forces of production to end the exploitation of man by man. What are the genuine new discoveries in socialist societies which make it necessary to modify the economic laws, and what are theories which merely revert to explanations based on capitalist practices when things appear to be going wrong? We can certainly point to successful developments of some of Marx's original ideas; examples are Lenin's thesis of breaking the weakest link in the chain of capitalism and his successful campaign to carry through a socialist revolution in one country, and Mao's strategy of using largely peasant armies to encircle and capture the cities when it became clear that proletarian uprisings originating in the cities had failed. Mao himself posed the contradiction between 'right opportunism' and 'left dogmatism', that is, the need to steer a correct course between following every new wind of thought that blows, on the one hand, and on the other a slavish adherence to ideas originating with Marx but no longer applicable in the concrete conditions of modern society, when very different conditions exist in different countries.

Several elements in Chinese policy now seem to be along similar lines to those which they themselves classified as 'revisionist' from the beginning of the break with the USSR. Some of these elements also relate to the current assessment of the work and ideas of Mao Zedong. While the tone of most articles around this topic is reasonable and balanced, nevertheless friends of China cannot help feeling that the constant reiteration of the 'ten years of chaos' theme comes close to the sort of extremist judgement which is rightly criticised in the Cultural Revolution itself. It was, after all, Zhou Enlai who set out the programme for modernisation and consolidation early in 1974, and although a more cautious attitude now prevails, no-one can doubt that these are the areas in which China most needs modernisation.

In this context, a crucial task is the strengthening of socialist relations of production while still continuing to improve the people's standard of living. Socialism must mean a better life because it brings forces and relations of production into harmony and not conflict, as is the case in the dying stage of capitalism. But there is a real danger of falling into the ways of conspicuous consumption, as in the West, with its inevitable trend towards a wider gap between elites and masses, town and country. If, as now seems to be the case, the free play of market forces is being used as a stimulus to higher production and better distribution, does it not follow that the Chinese have not yet found the correct method of achieving a socialist type of economic base? Commodity production, including the theory that the means of production themselves are commodities, will be necessary so long as industry and commerce cannot produce and distribute enough goods to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the people, but it will be equally necessary to ensure that factories do not allow the profit motive to distort their operation so that they neglect their proper role of contributing to the national plan. This is one area in which we shall expect to see a close watch kept on the contradictions that are inherent in this economic venture. It will not be enough to claim that the socialist nature of Chinese society has not changed, if there arises concrete evidence that it has begun to exhibit all the signs of doing so.

D.F.