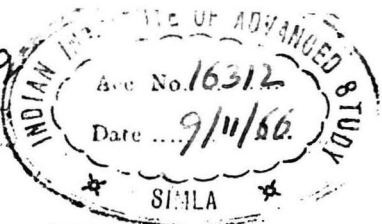


PH
050.95459
H 55 N



7/10/83

NEW CHINA VIA MOSCOW

By J. E. B. HILL, M.P.

Report of a lecture delivered at a meeting of the Royal Central Asian Society on Wednesday, December 11, 1957, Sir Hugh Dow, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: It is my pleasure to introduce the lecturer, Mr. John Hill, who is Conservative Member of Parliament for South Norfolk. Mr. Hill has a long acquaintance with the East. He did a considerable journey there shortly after coming down from Oxford. During the last war he served with distinction in the Royal Artillery. In 1956 he went back to China. It is of the latter journey and what he saw then that he is going to talk today, and show you the film he then made.

I understand that later still, Mr. Hill went to Formosa and Japan, and perhaps we may hope that on a future occasion he will be able to tell us about that journey.

YOU do me great honour in asking me to speak to this very learned Society. Most of you know infinitely more about the Far East, and probably China, than I, and I am afraid that today you may find that you have given up a large lunch for some rather light fare now. I am not going to give a lecture. I have a film to show you, but before doing so I think it might be worth giving you a few remarks about the background.

In 1956 I went in a group of Members of Parliament who were invited by the Peking Government. The only odd thing about it for me was that I was one of the first Conservatives to go there—that is to say, one of the first supporters of the British Government. I had been in China in 1935, when I went from Hong Kong overland to Changsha, later down the Yangtse to Hankow, and overland to Peking. Although I was only there as a rather rough tourist I got certain sight of the place, which I found useful when I went back last year. I was able to see some of the contrasts which had come about in the last twenty years and, more particularly, since China became a Communist nation.

Although my main interest there was agriculture, as you will see from the film, you have had a detailed lecture on agriculture in China in the last twelve months, and there is no time to go into agricultural detail today. Therefore, I thought that it might be most useful if I mentioned one or two points of contrast.

The fact that struck me most forcibly was that on entering China I entered a country. On my previous visit I had had a feeling that I was at large in, if not a continent, at any rate a sub-continent. On my last visit, however, I had a feeling of being in a united country, under a single authority.

I can give you one small example. Although all the currency is still in notes—and there is no silver dollar—the notes run everywhere. You do not have the appalling confusion of masses of different local bank notes which are valid only in a few provinces, which was one of the earlier difficulties.

You have a feeling of a country coming together, partly as a result of the cessation of the war which broke out shortly after I left China before, when the Japanese invaded, and partly the result of modern communica-

PRESENTED TO THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY, SIMLA

BY



Library IAS, Shimla

TMP 050.954 52 H 55 N



00016312

tions. A railway was being built between Canton and Changsha on my first visit. Now it is complete from Canton to Peking direct, over the new bridge at Wuhan. Likewise, the whole country has been joined together with air communications, and there are many more roads.

Conversely, one feels the enormous power of the central Government. That is apparent everywhere; even in the far west of China one was never out of range of the voice of Peking, because the spread of wireless and telecommunications is another remarkable feature. In the film you will see loudspeakers, which are capable of giving directions or a sing song, in the most unlikely places. Certainly we were rarely out of range of them.

I was impressed by the authority of the Government. My hosts were very charming; they could not have treated a known political opponent with greater tact and courtesy, in a characteristic Chinese way. None the less, I felt all the time the immense authority—withdrawn, but in the offing, and to be used if need be. I also noticed a rigid departmentalization, characteristic of the Communist set-up. We were the guests of the Institute of Foreign Affairs, and if one happened—as a photographer—to stray over the borderline into the territory of the Army, one found oneself in immediate difficulties and having to be rescued by one's hosts.

The effect upon the Chinese seemed to me to be really remarkable, in outward appearance. So many of what I had previously taken to be characteristics—almost ineradicable habits—had gone. Things like "squeeze" and tipping have disappeared, as have the flies. The only rat I saw was moving into the kitchen of the Peking Hotel. I suppose that was just ill-chance. I had the feeling that the Chinese people had been woken up. There is a certain dynamism behind them which the Government have inspired. Solemnity is ousting fun.

The next remarkable thing was the comparative unobtrusiveness of the Chinese Communist Party. I do not mean that it is not all-powerful; it quite obviously is, but it prefers to keep in the background. As far as I could see, most of the activities were carried on in the name of China, thereby having a great appeal to the people, and making a deliberate appeal to certain classes or sectors of the population, notably youth. There are great youth movements. Young people are encouraged by a series of sporting and athletic activities. We saw the national ping-pong championship in Hankow and the basketball championship somewhere else, and also a newsreel of the equivalent of the T.U.C. being addressed and being given a pretty tough pep talk, on the lines of "Work harder for your mother country," by a young lady who could not have been more than ten years old. She was fairly putting it across them. It was a remarkable film in every respect.

One had the distinct impression that the population was incessantly organized into groups of activities. It was rather like a parody of school, that it is best to keep the boys occupied as much of the day as possible; it is good for their health and morale. One got that impression when one went to a farm and saw either a reading class or some other form of group activity going on. They did not seem to have a great deal of leisure or privacy, and I believe that that is deliberate Government policy.

The Russian influence was marked. Not that we saw many Russians:

on the whole they were beginning to withdraw from the particular projects shown to us, for the reason that their work had largely been done and the Chinese were able to carry on.

We went to the great steel works at Anshan, rebuilt since the war largely with the help of Russian experts. That was also the case with the big bridge at Wuhan. One sensed the Russian influence everywhere. There was the permanent Russian pavilion in Peking, and the one in Hankow—showy, splendid buildings—and there were Russian posters of their leaders in all the schools. Stalin was pretty well everywhere. That was a comment on the de-Stalinization programme which was then supposed to be in force.

There were other odd signs of Soviet influence, even down to the dairy Chinese cows are milked four times a day at times which would not be tolerated in Britain, a routine imported from the Soviet Union.

That seemed to contrast with the quite remarkable ignorance of conditions in the West. For example, visiting the University one found that political science started with Marxist-Leninism, and there was no longer any time for Aristotle, because the whole thing had become speeded up with the great expansion of all forms of education; and there was a quite remarkable ignorance of Western conditions, even in the University, which formerly had had very close connections with Oxford and Cambridge.

There are now no other British newspapers than the *Daily Worker* and a rather obscure ultra left wing political journal representative of no party in this country, although there were a lot of British technical publications, such as those on agricultural research. I could see none dealing with the more humane subjects, still less with anything in the political field. My abiding impression was one of an extremely powerful Government, with complete economic control, and one which I think was getting a response from the people, although there are no doubt some grievances and a good deal of potential opposition. Such is the power of the Government and the apparatus of control that I feel convinced that the Government are firmly in the saddle. Although they may have setbacks, particularly in agriculture, I regard it as well within their power to maintain themselves and bring about the industrialization of China. I would not like to estimate how many years it will take, because it is so much bound up with the agricultural programme, but I have no doubt that they will do it in the relatively long run.

The film is a pure travelogue. It is rather slight, and was made under haphazard conditions, with a very great shortage of film stock. I apologize for its technical shortcomings.

The film was then shown, with commentary by Mr. Hill.

Owing to shortness of time there was no opportunity for questions afterwards.

The CHAIRMAN: I am sure that you would wish me to thank Mr. Hill on your behalf for a most interesting and beautiful film, and also for his own extremely illuminating and informative comments, which do not leave us much room for asking questions, even if we had the time. Thank you very much, Mr. Hill.

(A vote of thanks was accorded to Mr. Hill by acclamation.)

