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Notes from China

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I THE CHINESE POINT OF VIEW
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Foreword

I have had the good fortune to visit China three times, in 1953, 1957 and 1963, for six or eight weeks each time, as the guest of the China Committee for the Promotion of International Trade.

Unfortunately I do not know any Chinese language and I have made no special study of Chinese history. I am not well qualified to discuss its affairs. However, since there is so much malicious misrepresentation of China in the Western press, now being repeated and exaggerated in Russia, it seems to me to be a duty for anyone who has been able to make the smallest first-hand observation to offer it, for whatever it may be worth, to whoever is interested.

In the tragic disputes now taking place, it seems to me out of place for an English observer to take up an anti-Indian or an anti-Soviet position. But it is even more out of place to support them against China on the basis of their propaganda. I hope that the following observations may at least show that there is another side to the story.

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Cambridge JOAN ROBINSON

I

THE CHINESE POINT OF VIEW

CHINA is surrounded by a thunderous barrage of propaganda. In some ways that which comes from within is more damaging to her than that which comes from without. Much of the hostile propaganda is based on such obvious absurdities that it can be readily discounted. But China's own propaganda, for a non-Marxist peace-loving Westerner, produces a very unsympathetic impression.

The method of arguing by quoting the scriptures appears antiquated and obscurantist and seems to justify the accusation of dogmatism; even those who admit the pre-eminence of Lenin must surely agree with the Russian view that the world situation has changed, since his day, so radically that his sayings can no longer provide infallible guidance. The black-or-white pronouncements—everything rotten in Yugoslavia, everything above criticism in Albania—are singularly unconvincing. There seems to be a serious failure of logic in describing U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. as having a monopoly of atom bombs. The expectation that foreigners will be favourably impressed by this line of talk itself indicates gross ignorance of how other people feel.

Inside the barrage however, in Peking in the summer of 1963, I found plenty of people to talk to whom I could understand perfectly well.

I was not interested in discussing ideology. An ideology is essentially a rationalisation—an appeal to high metaphysical principles to justify policies that

arise out of mundane necessity. This is just as much true of Marxist ideology as of any other. The very fact that, in this sphere of discourse, *revisionism* is a term of abuse shows that it belongs to the realm of theology, where to prove that a statement is heretical is more damaging than to prove that it is false. The Chinese mentality is not naturally theological. Their empirical, commonsense outlook is much closer to the English than to the Russian or the Indian. They use the ideological style in public pronouncements, I suppose, because they think it is the right thing to do. In private conversation (if one can avoid slogan-mongering bores) political questions are discussed in a very realistic and practical manner.

By this I do not mean to suggest that the Chinese devotion to Marxism is in any way insincere. The leaders, doubtless, are supported by deep convictions which are confirmed to them by the evident miracle of their success; the people generally are suffused by a spirit which has something in common with war-time patriotism and something in common with what one imagines of a great new religion in its early days, before faith becomes contaminated with cynicism. Marxism is the light that has led them out of the weakness and defeat, out of the moral and physical stink, of the old China. In these matters, it is not the logical content of the creed, but its manifest power, that commands belief.

Even apart from ideology, the views of each of us on world affairs are strongly influenced by the geographical position of our own country and its historical experience. On the spot, it is easier to understand the way people feel. How does the world appear today to a Chinese observer?

U.S.A.

To a Chinese observer of world affairs, it appears that the successive governments of the United States represent the interests of those who are determined to preserve as large a sphere as possible for capitalist exploitation of the labour and the resources of the world. No standards of reason, justice or humanity are allowed to stand in their way. In this campaign, their hostility is directed particularly at China. Their enmity to the People's Republic does not arise from anything in particular, but from the mere fact that it exists. This rules out any possibility of compromise. They maintain the pitiful farce of treating Taiwan as China in the United Nations. They protect and encourage the defeated tyrant, Chiang Kai-shek. They have not so far permitted him to attempt an invasion of the mainland (which would finish him off) but they allow him to send in saboteurs and to get up to all kinds of mischief in South East Asia. They even supplied him with U2s to spy on China.

American forces advanced across the 38th parallel, in the face of the Chinese warning that this would be regarded as a threat to her frontiers, and had to be driven back at great cost to all concerned. (Korea was in the Soviet rather than the Chinese sphere of influence when the frontier was crossed from the North; it was not by their own will that the Chinese became involved.) The U.S. is now engaged in a cruel and hopeless war of repression in South Vietnam. The record in Western Asia and Latin America follows the same pattern. The good, well-meaning individuals sent out to aid underdeveloped countries are in a false position (as, by the way, many of them admit) because the object of the operation is not to aid the

people there to develop, but to keep reactionary governments in power.

The Chinese observer is careful to distinguish the 'ruling circles' in U.S.A. from the people. The people, even white Americans, will in the long run come out on the right side. But he knows very well that for the time being there are no progressive forces, let alone a revolutionary proletariat, in the United States, that can be relied upon to restrain their government from no matter what atrocities. Hope lies rather in the struggle for liberation of other nations from the grip of American economic power. The sphere of capitalism in the world will be eroded piecemeal. In the latter end, capitalism will be overthrown in the United States itself; but this seems to be a matter of faith more than reasoned hope; in any case it is too distant a prospect to be of any influence in forming policy today.

Others may distinguish two great conflicts in the post-war world—a vertical division, so to say, between capitalism and socialism and a horizontal division between imperialism and nationalism. For the Chinese, the two conflicts are one. Their own revolution was a patriotic movement led by Communists; the power behind their drive towards socialism comes as much from the determination to make their ancient nation once more strong and independent as from dedication to Marxist ideology. Neither one makes sense without the other. To them it seems clear that the only way of escape for the hungry and miserable is first to assert their national independence and then to build up economic independence. They will soon find that, to this end, socialism is the only way. Anti-imperialism,

anti-neo-colonialism and anti-capitalism are various aspects of the same thing.

For China the national enemy and the ideological enemy coincide. It is idle to speculate how their attitude might have been softened if the United States had observed the decencies of international intercourse in their behaviour towards the People's Republic of China. As it is, the issue is only too painfully clear.

The familiar indictment was repeated at the Warsaw Session of World Peace Council by Liao Cheng-chih.[1]

> In their recent speeches, have not U.S. government leaders, while talking glibly about 'peace', 'freedom', 'self-determination' and 'co-operation', blatantly revealed their real intentions of stepping up their policies of aggression and war?
>
> They have shouted about 'maintaining strategic deterrents', doing their best to carry on counter-revolutionary wars to suppress national-independence struggles, strangling socialist Cuba, continuing and 'winning' the 'special war' in South Vietnam, 'unifying' Germany according to U.S. designs, marshalling all reactionary forces to 'contain' China, subverting East European socialist countries, and using their position of strength to compel the Soviet Union to renounce communism.
>
> They have also boasted about the achievements of the U.S. arms drive: that the number of nuclear weapons available in its strategic alert forces had increased by 100 per cent, the number of combat-ready army divisions by 45

[1] *Peking Review* No. 49., December 6th 1963.

per cent, the procurement of its airlift planes by 175 per cent and its special guerrilla and counter insurgency forces by 600 per cent.

How can we relax our vigilance in the face of such a vicious enemy of world peace?

U.S.S.R.

The grievances of the Chinese against Khrushchev are on three levels. First, they object to his claim to dictate policy without consulting other Communist Parties in general and their's in particular. Second, they disagree with the policy that he seeks to dictate. Third, they find him personally erratic, undependable and subject to fits of rage. They say: He has no rules.

The Chinese made their own revolution without any military help from Stalin—indeed with some hindrance. They freely acknowledge the technical help that they received from the Soviets before 1960, but the material they received had to be paid for on onerous terms. (Prices charged to the Chinese for equipment were higher than to other countries, and the quality inferior. At one enterprise I was told that the Russian adjudicators had had to admit a claim for one million roubles compensation for faulty machines supplied.) They have no reason to regard themselves as a satellite of the Soviets and they attribute the attempt to treat them so to Russian great-nation chauvinism. They make a conscious effort to avoid great-nation chauvinism on their own account but they regard Mao Tse-tung as the greatest thinker since Lenin and they deeply resent the vulgar abuse that Khrushchev heaps upon him.

Whatever Khrushchev's policy had been, they would have resisted his attempt to impose it upon them.

But the most substantial question is the policy that he tried to impose. That is, to attempt to come to terms with U.S.A. without taking Chinese interests into account. Instead of insisting that China should be brought into the discussion of disarmament, Khruschev cancelled an agreement to supply them with atomic know-how in order to placate Eisenhower. He demanded that they should accept a settlement with Kennedy on the basis of Two Chinas. (This I think has been only hinted at in the documents but was freely mentioned in conversation in Peking.) Moreover, it is not only they who suffer. He has withdrawn support from national liberation movements all over the world and called off the struggle against imperialism.

After all this, he only succeeded in getting a pitifully small concession—a partial test ban. The Chinese refuse to see in this any hope of further improvement. It will, they say, only deceive the decent, peace-loving people in the West, and slacken their efforts (such as they are) to influence their own governments towards genuine disarmament. And the U.S.A. having found out Khrushchev's weakness will press him further and further.

The Russian case may be crudely stated thus: The Americans are dangerous. They are quite capable of blowing up the world in retaliation for some minor attack on Imperialism in some small country. Much better to go slow now and avoid danger. In the long run the strength of the socialist camp will grow and national liberation for all will come of itself.

To this line of argument the Chinese reply, first, that the risk is not so great as the Russians make out.

The Americans, after all, are not as mad as all that. They must recognise that to intervene in an anti-colonial war with atom bombs is absurd and that an international atomic war would mean the end of capitalism. If half the human race were wiped out, the survivors would rebuild the world on socialist lines. Second, admitting that there is a risk, it is a risk that must be taken. Otherwise atomic blackmail will be used to perpetuate Imperialism indefinitely and keep two-thirds of the human race in subjection and poverty without hope of release. To take a specific example, the Soviet Government refrained from recognising the Algerian Government until their war was over, and the Communist Party in France (under Soviet influence) refrained from supporting their fight for liberation. What good was this to U.S.S.R. or to the world?

To counter attack, Khruschev resorts to twisting Mao's words to suggest that he would welcome a world war, and turning the anti-colonialist appeal to Asia, Africa and Latin America into a racist slogan. The accusation of being warmongers is all the more galling because the Chinese leaders, conscious of their weakness, have been painfully restrained in their policy. They were obliged to defend themselves, as they see it, in Korea and on the Indian border. But at present, over South Korea, South Vietnam, and the offshore islands, over Macao and Hong Kong, they are leaning backwards to avoid provocation. They rely upon building up their own economy and letting time work for them outside.

It might be said therefore (as Khruschev gleefully points out) that they are pursuing in practice the very same policy that they object to in theory. Their

answer is that they have more sense than to run into hopeless adventures but that they have never betrayed their principles, broken their engagements or let down their allies.

In U.S.S.R., the Chinese say, the Party has lost touch with the people. A class of bosses and managers has grown up who have become a new bourgeoisie. Khrushchev represents these social forces. He offers his subjects more butter and more lace on their panties. He forgets the hungry world and allies himself with the haves against the have nots. For this reason he is trying to make a composition with U.S.A. so that the two great powers can run the world and keep the have-nots in their place. Chinese propaganda is directed mainly to calling upon the Communist Parties of the world to repudiate this programme.

Large and Small Wars

In the interchange of open letters with the Soviets, Chinese spokesmen build their case upon the fact that liberation from imperialism is by no means already completed.

> Victories of great historic significance have already been won by the national liberation movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This no one can deny. But can anyone assert that the task of combating imperialism and colonialism and their agents has been completed by the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America?
>
> Our answer is, no. This fighting task is far from completed. . . .
>
> Consider, first, the situation in Asia and Africa. There a whole group of countries have declared their independence. But many of these countries

have not completely shaken off imperialist and colonial control and enslavement and remain objects of imperialist plunder and agression as well as arenas of contention between the old and new colonialists. In some, the old colonialists have changed into neo-colonialists and retain their colonial rule through their trained agents. In others, the wolf has left by the front door, but the tiger has entered through the back door, the old colonialism being replaced by the new, more powerful and more dangerous U.S. colonialism. The peoples of Asia and Africa are seriously menaced by the tentacles of neo-colonialism, represented by U.S. imperialism. . . . The facts are clear. After World War II the imperialists have certainly not given up colonialism, but have merely adopted a new form, neo-colonialism. An important characteristic of such neo-colonialism is that the imperialists have been forced to change their old style of direct colonial rule in some areas and to adopt a new style of colonial rule and exploitation by relying on the agents they have selected and trained. The imperialists headed by the United States enslave or control the colonial countries and countries which have already declared their independence by organizing military blocs, setting up military bases, establishing 'federations' or 'communities', and fostering puppet regimes. By means of economic 'aid' or other forms, they retain these countries as markets for their goods, sources of raw material and outlets for their export of capital, plunder the riches and suck the blood of the people of these countries. Moreover, they use the

> United Nations as an important tool for interfering in the internal affairs of such countries and for subjecting them to military, economic and cultural aggression. When they are unable to continue their rule over these countries by 'peaceful' means, they engineer military coups d'etat, carry out subversion or even resort to direct armed intervention and aggression[1].

The dangers involved in the struggle are, naturally, very differently assessed from different points of view. The case was argued by Dr. Joseph Needham in a letter to *The New Statesman* of August 9th 1963, which was welcomed in China as a clear statement of their point of view:

> Very many people are afraid of 'small local wars' because of the danger of their escalating into world thermo-nuclear catastrophe. It would be logical, therefore, in an age of nuclear weapons, that the present state of social and political life should be 'frozen' throughout the world. Let no one take any step which might set free uncontrollable forces.
>
> But it is much easier for some people to accept this than others. Those who are relatively comfortable (such as western Europeans, and now, it seems, Russians and eastern Europeans also) are naturally drawn to such a policy of safety. But the greater part of the world (for example Algerian or Indian countryfolk, black Africans in South Africa, the peasants of Vietnam or the miners of the Andes) consists of people

[1] *Apologists of Neo-Colonialism. Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Communist Committee of the C.P.S.U.* (IV) (Foreign Languages Press, Peking), pp. 3–5.

who are not at all comfortable, and the prospect of indefinite prolongation of what they feel to be 'colonial' or other oppression or deprivation is not an attractive one. Hence they are not drawn to a fireproof safety policy. When the Chinese say that nuclear weapons cannot halt the process of history, this is surely what they mean.

China's government advocates, and has long advocated, the total prohibition and destruction of nuclear weapons; it has now called a world conference to that end. But whether or not this objective can be attained, the Chinese reserve the right to support the people's cause in 'small local wars', in spite of the danger of escalation, because they consider that these will inevitably arise in the course of the general upsurge of the undeveloped countries towards decent minimal living standards, an upsurge which powerful forces will continue to oppose. This does not necessarily imply direct military intervention. Still less does it mean the use of nuclear weapons, which the Chinese do not possess. Above all it is something very different from the wish, often imputed to China, to induce a nuclear catastrophe in order that Chinese communism may alone emerge triumphant from it.

On the contrary, the Chinese conviction that humanity will control the bomb and that the bomb will not put an end to humanity may be seen as an expression of that profound humanism which has characterised Chinese civilisation throughout the ages. This optimistic belief may well be felt by westerners, whose civilisation

embodies so much more of the supernatural and the irrational, to be dangerously unjustified, but its high and rational faith should be recognised if not admired.

The same point was made even more forcefully by Che Guevara in an interview with Cedric Belfrage in Cuba soon after the crisis of October 1962.[1] Belfrage asked 'What about the danger of revolutions setting off a nuclear war?' Che Guevara replied:

> Well, you have to face that. But what about the people who are dying anyway in what is known as peace? I doubt if you Europeans and North Americans can ever understand how it looks to a Latin American *campesino*. His children die of hunger and disease, his wife is violated, he is beaten and treated as a slave—and you, in your pleasant ambience of security, expect him to do nothing because it might start a war. But he is not interested in your survival. As for himself, he prefers to die for something that's real to him—but on the other hand he might conquer and enjoy life a bit for a change. Anyhow, he is the one with only chains to lose, and the one who will do it; the proletariat is not a shock-force in under-developed countries. In our revolution we found we had done just what Mao wrote without ever reading him—it's common sense in any country of our type.

It appears that in Latin America the Chinese point of view corresponds more closely to experience than the Russian.

[1] *The Man at the Door with the Gun.* (Monthly Review Press), p. 246.

No Rules

The third level of the Chinese indictment—Khrushchev's erratic personality—is not important from an ideological point of view, but it is serious in practice. The most striking example of how the Chinese have suffered from it is the withdrawal of the Russian technicians in 1960. For nearly three years nothing was published about this affair and Chinese people never mentioned it in the presence of foreigners. Now that it all comes bursting out in the spate of embittered controversy, it seems too fantastic to be credible, but there is no dispute about the facts.

Suddenly, just at the time of most severe economic difficulties in China, the technicians were instructed to pack up and come home, taking away with them the blue-prints of the installations on which they were working, and contracts for supplies of equipment were abruptly broken. The only explanation that seems plausible is that Khrushchev, in a fit of exasperation, uttered a threat intended to bring the Chinese Government to heel, and then felt obliged to carry it out.

Some fresh details were given in an editorial article in December:

> However, the great achievements gained since 1958 was no plain sailing. As a result of the serious natural calamities in the three consecutive years between 1959 and 1961, there was a great decline in grain and industrial crop output, which brought on very great difficulties. During the few preceding years, because of the lack of experience in construction and in the absence of comprehensive, specific policies, and because some of the work was not done in the spirit

> of the general line, some shortcomings and mistakes occurred in our practical work; this, too, made difficulties for our economic construction. During that period, we also encountered an unexpected difficulty. In July 1960, the Soviet authorites actually took this opportunity to bring pressure to bear upon us and extended ideological differences between the Chinese and Soviet Communist Parties to state relations; they suddenly and unilaterally decided on a complete withdrawal of the 1,390 experts who were in China to help in our work, they tore up 343 contracts for experts and the supplements to these contracts and abolished 257 items for scientific and technical co-operation and since then, they have reduced in large numbers the supplies of complete sets of equipment and key sections of various other equipment. This has caused our construction to suffer huge losses, thereby upsetting our original plan for the development of our national economy and greatly aggravating our difficulties.[1]

As it happens, it was not particularly intelligent to choose the moment of acute agricultural trouble for this blow. Investment in any case had to be cut down. The damage to the Chinese economy was mainly in slowing down industrial development after the agricultural crisis had been overcome. This was not too high a price for independence. Indeed, some observers are apt to count the whole affair as an example of 'a bad thing turned into a good thing' since most of the technical problems have now been cracked by Chinese experts, and self reliance makes

[1] *Peking Review* No. 49. December 6th, 1963, p. 10.

them all the stronger. On a less romantic estimate, the damage will be felt for some years yet.

However that may be, it is no excuse for Khrushchev, who evidently supposed that he was attacking the Chinese when they were too weak to survive the shock. Even an American administration, they say, does not behave with such a total disregard for the conventions. Khrushchev has no rules.

Stalin

One of the elements in Chinese propaganda least sympathetic to Western ears is their defence of Stalin. But to them it means something quite different from what it means to us. It illustrates once more the three levels of their objection to Khrushchev's policy.

First of all, the secret speech of the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Party was made without any warning or consultation of other Parties, but all were required to accept the new line. The Chinese leaders would object to this in principle even if they had no particular views about the substance of the statement. Resentment at Khruschev's attempt to dictate to them began to grow from that day.

They also objected to the substance of the new line. They had their own bitter grievances against Stalin, which they had swallowed for the sake of unity. They had taught their people to look up to their 'Soviet elder brothers' and to regard Stalin as a great leader of the movement to which they all belonged. Their public was not ready suddenly to be told that he was a criminal. They felt no need for a destalinisation, since in their view, they had never abandoned 'inner-party democracy' or violated 'socialist legality'. Popular adulation of Mao is not on a par with the

'cult of personality' in the Russian sense; it is the response to a great national leader springing spontaneously from the people, not worked up by sycophants. They had no desire to defend Stalin's crimes, but they did not wish to advertise them.

Finally, the way the revelations were made, the exaggerations, injustice and lack of historical sense, were typical of Khrushchev's irresponsible mentality.

An open letter *On the Question of Stalin* argues the case very sharply.

> Comrade Khrushchev completely negated Stalin at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. He failed to consult the fraternal Parties in advance on this question of principle which involves the whole international communist movement, and afterwards tried to impose a fait accompli on them. Whoever makes an appraisal of Stalin different from that of the leadership of the CPSU is charged with 'defence of the personality cult' as well as 'interference' in the internal affairs of the CPSU. But no one can deny the international significance of the historical experience of the first state of the dictatorship of the proletariat, or the historical fact that Stalin was the leader of the international communist movement; consequently, no one can deny that the appraisal of Stalin is an important question of principle involving the whole international communist movement. On what ground, then, do the leaders of the CPSU forbid other fraternal Parties to make a realistic analysis and appraisal of Stalin? . . . .
>
> The Communist Party of China has consistently held that Stalin did commit errors, which had their ideological as well as social and historical

roots. It is necessary to criticize the errors Stalin actually committed, not those groundlessly attributed to him, and to do so from a correct stand and with correct methods. But we have consistently opposed improper criticism of Stalin, made from a wrong stand and with wrong methods. . . .

While defending Stalin, we do not defend his mistakes. Long ago the Chinese Communists had first-hand experience of some of his mistakes. Of the erroneous 'Left' and Right opportunist lines which emerged in the Chinese Communist Party at one time or another, some arose under the influence of certain mistakes of Stalin's, in so far as their international sources were concerned. In the late Twenties, the Thirties and the early and middle Forties, the Chinese Marxist-Leninists represented by Comrades Mao Tse-tung and Liu Shao-chi resisted the influence of Stalin's mistakes; they gradually overcame the erroneous lines of 'Left' and Right opportunism and finally led the Chinese revolution to victory.

But since some of the wrong ideas put forward by Stalin were accepted and applied by certain Chinese comrades, we Chinese should bear the responsibility. In its struggle against 'Left' and Right opportunism, therefore, our Party criticized only its own erring comrades and never put the blame on Stalin. The purpose of our criticism was to distinguish between right and wrong, learn the appropriate lessons and advance the revolutionary cause. We merely asked the erring comrades that they should correct their mistakes. If they failed to do so, we waited until they were

gradually awakened by their own practical experience, provided they did not organize secret groups for clandestine and disruptive activities. Our method was the proper method of inner-Party criticism and self-criticism, we started from the desire for unity and arrived at a new unity on a new basis through criticism and struggle, and thus good results were achieved. We held that these were contradictions among the people and not between the enemy and ourselves, and that therefore we should use the above method.

(I tried to point out to my Chinese friends that, from our point of view, it is rather too mild to describe the Stalinist persecutions as 'errors'. But all their indignation was concentrated on Khrushchev.)

TIBET

The accusation of aggression in Tibet is rebutted by the claim that Tibet is as much a part of China as Wales is of the United Kingdom. At first, when they accepted reunion, the Tibetan administration enjoyed complete internal autonomy, subject to an agreement to carry through some elementary reforms. The reforms were delayed; Peking remained patient and correct, until the rebellion in 1959—a bad thing turned into a good thing—allowed them to throw out the ancient tyranny and begin to clean the place up. Reform goes slowly even now. The people enjoy 'three abolitions and two reductions'—the abolition of rebellion, *corvée* and serfdom, and reduction of rent and interest. Education and medical services are being introduced. Religion is respected and monasteries damaged in the fighting have been repaired.

The rebels never had any popular support and the liberated peasants are happy to be rid of them. (Nothing much is ever said about the Khambas who are generally dismissed as hereditary bandits. I suppose they are one more sad case of wild people who much prefer not to be civilized.)

The few foreigners who have visited Tibet confirm the Chinese account of what is happening there.

> What practical improvements has it been possible to achieve in so short a time? There have been three major advances from which all progress can develop. First, the feudal system which paralysed the country and the parasitic power of the church which dominated it have been overthrown by the liberation of the serfs, the distribution of land among the people and the disestablishment of the monasteries, which can no longer live on the taxation of the laity. Second, the introduction of a national education system, which is essential if the people are to be able to use the agricultural and industrial techniques which can now be made available to them. Third, a modern medical service which will maintain the people in better health and increase the birth rate in a country where the population is too low to exploit the potential wealth of Tibet.
>
> The hard labour of serfs and the primitive methods of agriculture were adequate to provide a minority with immense wealth compared with the poverty of the majority. They could never give a decent standard of living for the present population, let alone a good one.
>
> But by abolishing the feudal system and breaking the economic power of the monasteries

the new government released resources of food which, however thinly spread, have raised standards to a more tolerable level. The human energy and enterprise released in freeing the serfs is incalculable and perhaps the most important contribution to the increase of production.[1]

INDIA

The Chinese story of the border question is easier to follow than the Indian version. When two great modern nations, liberated from Imperialist domination, meet at a frontier for the first time, a new situation is created. Many 'problems left over by history' have to be settled. The Chinese side offered to negotiate and meanwhile proposed a demilitarized strip between the two armies, to prevent clashes from occuring. The Indian side would do nothing but reiterate their territorial claims, which, however far-fetched, they insisted on regarding as indisputable and sacrosanct. (An English historian, by no means biased in favour of China, has exposed the flimsy basis of much of the Indian case)[2] By setting up advanced posts behind the Chinese positions they invited retaliation, and finally launched an offensive, in October 1962, to which the Chinese were obliged to reply in force.

The explanation is that the Indian Government represents capitalist elements who set class above country. (The Indian mentality is baffling to the Chinese. That a man like Pandit Nehru should be friendly, even grateful, to his late oppressors, suggests nothing but a despicable lack of national self-respect.)

[1] Stuart and Roma Gelder. 'The Truth About Tibet', *Eastern Horizon*, October, 1963, p. 17–18.
[2] Alistair Lamb. *The China-Indian Border*. Chatham House Essays.

They are alarmed at the idea of having the liberated peasantry of Tibet in touch with their own people. They are eager for an excuse to call in American military aid. And they need chauvinistic clamour to keep the minds of their population off their own miseries. In the long run the Indian people will 'stand up'. Meanwhile the Chinese regard them with sympathy and goodwill. (The Chinese seem to be blind to the damage that their spectacular military success did to the progressive elements in India and to the cause of anti-Imperialist solidarity, or at least they prefer to believe that it will all come right in the long run.)

Some Indian politicians flatter themselves that their troubles with China were a cause of the quarrel between Khrushchev and Mao. The Chinese see it the other way round. Khrushchev was making a cat's paw of India in his efforts to intimidate China. Subsequent developments seem to bear out the Chinese rather than the Indian view.

WESTERN EUROPE

The Chinese authorities are prepared to behave correctly to anyone who behaves correctly to them. We British get good marks for having promptly recognised the People's Republic (though not much for winding up our Empire, on the whole, peacefully). The possibility of enlarging trade in conditions of 'equality and mutal benefit' is opening up with the forced decline of exchanges with U.S.S.R. (but Japan seems to be in the way to reap the main benefit). Friendly relations are encouraged but it is necessary to preserve a cautious attitude to nations which are the declared allies of U.S.A.

The Bomb.

It is not easy for a British interlocutor to meet the Chinese argument that, if any one needs an 'independent deterrent', it is they. For a socialist country, they claim, atomic weapons are purely defensive. One of the counts against Khrushchev is his threat to wipe out Great Britain at the time of the Suez crisis.

> We have always maintained that socialist countries must not use nuclear weapons to support the peoples' wars of national liberation and revolutionary civil wars and have no need to do so.
>
> We have always maintained that the socialist countries must achieve and maintain nuclear superiority. Only this can prevent the imperialists from launching a nuclear war and help bring about the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons.
>
> We consistently hold that in the hands of a socialist country, nuclear weapons must always be defensive weapons for resisting imperialist nuclear threats. A socialist country absolutely must not be the first to use nuclear weapons, nor should it in any circumstances play with them or engage in nuclear blackmail and nuclear gambling.[1]

In the Chinese view it was a stupid and irresponsible adventure to take bombs to Cuba. Once there, it was wrong to humiliate Castro by offering to accept inspection of the withdrawal. The partial test-ban treaty is mere deception; it will only put off genuine

[1] *Two Different Lines on the Question of War and Peace* (Foreign Languages Press, Peking) p. 26.

disarmament. The Chinese need to have a bomb of their own to discourage U.S.A. from attacking them, now that the Russian umbrella has been withdrawn. (Here the argument grows tangled, for they do not admit that it was the Russian umbrella that has saved them so far, and they have been maintaining all along that U.S. administration do not use atomic weapons because to do so would finally discredit them and bring their hopes of world dominance to an end.) However, it would not increase their security to ruin their economy by setting up as an atomic power. So the argument ends in the air.

THE LUCKY CHILDREN

If, as they see it, the Russian revolution went wrong, how can they ensure that theirs will not? The generation now growing up are the lucky children who inherit what their father's fought and suffered to win. They are prone to take everything for granted. They do not realise how much there is still to do and some begin to hanker after 'poshism' and relaxation. Children of literate families pass examinations more easily than those equally able from peasant homes —there is a danger of a quasi-hereditary elite re-establishing itself. Among the peasants, it is necessary to be on guard against the 'spontaneous development of capitalism' from the permitted private trade within the communes. In all the taunting criticism of materialism and corruption in U.S.S.R. there is a note of anxiety—'We must not let it happen here'.

CONCLUSION

Whether the Western observer finds the Chinese point of view sympathetic or deplorable, the moral to be drawn from it is the same. It is we who are disgraced by the United Nations farce. It is we who suffer from restricting trade. It is we who are piling up trouble for the future by trying to organise the world without the largest country in it.

To abuse and attack the Chinese makes them all the more certain that they are right. The only way to combat the view that Imperialism is a menace to peace or that the partial test ban will not lead to genuine disarmament, is to use whatever influence we may have to prove it wrong.

II

THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNES

THERE is a curious line of argument, which seems to be shared by Mr. Krushchev and the London *Times* correspondent in Hong Kong, according to which the formation of the agricultural communes in China was a wicked and stupid policy, aiming at destroying family life and reducing the helpless peasantry to a state of virtual serfdom, which has now proved a failure and cracked up. One would suppose that if the policy was wrong, retreat from it must be regarded as an improvement. But the critics want to have it both ways. The pretended break-up of the communes is only evidence that the Chinese authorities have failed to fulfil the promises that they made to the people.

It is certainly true that in the exalted mood of the Great Leap in 1958 there was much Utopian talk and some schemes were started which proved impracticable. The commune system was thoroughly well put through the wringer during the three 'bitter years' of flood and drought that followed 1958 (when the critics were shedding crocodile tears over the 'famine') and has emerged in a sensible, flexible and realistic form.

When I had the good fortune to visit China for two months in the summer of 1963 I decided to concentrate mainly on studying the commune system.

ORGANISATION

I had a very useful preliminary briefing in Peking. Although the achievements of the Great Leap in 1958 are a matter of pride and satisfaction to the Party and

the people, it is admitted that serious mistakes were made and that over-investment occurred which put the economy into an unbalanced position. In the normal way this would have been corrected over the course of a year or two without any great disturbance. But as bad luck would have it, the three 'bitter years' of natural disasters followed, and the unbalanced state of the economy made them all the harder to meet.

In the course of struggling through the years of bad harvests, an important change in basic policy was made. The Soviet dogma of the permanent priority of heavy industry was abandoned. It was realised that the limit to the development of industry is the agricultural surplus, and that to achieve a surplus it is necessary to offer to the peasants some goods that they want to buy. The new line is expressed in the slogan: Agriculture the foundation, industry the leading factor. Concretely, it is embodied in a redirection of the economic plan to promote a faster rise of agricultural output both by more direct investment (especially in fertilisers) and by increased production of goods to sell in the rural areas (bicycles, radio sets and sewing machines are the favourites at present).

During the bitter years the commune system was hammered into shape. The wild Utopian talk of jumping straight to communism was repudiated by the Party already before the end of 1958, but some unpractical notions were tried out. The most important was the system of so-called free food. Rations were calculated in terms of so much for a worker, so much for a school child, etc. and supplied to the families irrespective of their earnings. This proved both to be wasteful and to weaken the incentive to earn; it was generally abandoned in 1960. Village

canteens went out of fashion at the same time. On the philosophical point, it is proclaimed that the communes are a *socialist* form of organisation (to each according to his work) not a *communist* one.

The three-tier system of teams, brigades and communes has been grafted on to the ancient roots of rural life. On the one hand the staff of the commune has taken over the functions of the lowest rung in the old ladder of the administration—the *Hsiang*. It is the channel through which the villagers deal with higher authorities for planning production, sales, purchases, taxation and so forth. On the other hand, the individual household is fostered and encouraged as the basic unit of economic life. (The propagandist stories about the destruction of family life are very wide of the mark.) A team consists of the workers of twenty or thirty neighbour families. The land allotted to them is, in the main, the land that their forefathers worked, with some modifications for convenience in cultivation. Eight or ten teams are grouped in a brigade. In the plains, where villages are large, the brigade usually comprises a single village. There is emulation between brigades which enlists old village rivalries in a constructive cause. The commune comprises two or three dozen brigades and covers an area of anything from a thousand to fifty thousand acres, depending upon the nature of the terraine.

The change from the unitary co-operatives (generally set up in 1956) to the triple organisation of the communes corresponds to economic common sense. The co-operative, usually identical with the present-day brigade, was found generally to be too large a unit for the management of labour, and too small a unit for the management of land.

The problems of day to day direction of some thousand workers, in the co-operatives, of accounting for the labour-time of each, and of reckoning the distribution of the product, proved to be a strain on the managerial capacity available. Moreover sharing in the product of such a large group weakened incentive. For these reasons it was found more practical to make the team the accounting unit. Each team has at its disposal a particular area of land, with implements and animals. It undertakes a particular part of the annual plan of production and of sales to the state procurement agency. From the year's gross proceeds in cash and kind are deducted costs, land tax, and contributions to the welfare fund and the accumulation fund of the team. The remainder (usually about 60 per cent of the gross proceeds) is distributed to the members of the team in proportion to the labour points that each has earned. Thus what the workers bring to their household income depends on the work they each put in and upon the value of a work point in their own team. There is a wide variation in the value of a work point between one team and another. It is the business of the commune staff to find out the causes of low earnings and to help the weaker teams to improve.

The problems of day-to-day operations are found to be more manageable at the level of the team than they were in the co-operatives of 1956. On the other hand, the co-operatives were inconveniently small from the point of view of investment in land. The commune movement originated in a number of co-operatives getting together to organise water control. This has remained a major function of the commune organisation. It proved its worth also as a method of organising

relief during the bad years. The brigade is responsible for the allocation of land to teams, and for the annual crop programme. At each level subsidiary activities are carried on. In the typical case, the household carries out handicraft work and rears pigs and chickens. The team breeds pigs. The brigade breeds draft animals, runs a brick kiln, and grinds corn for the household and for sale in the village shop. The commune runs a tool factory and repair shop and is responsible for the transmission of electric power. In some cases the commune owns a park of tractors. (In other cases contract ploughing is undertaken by the county authorities or a neighbouring state firm.)

MARKETING

The marketing system, also, has been developed in such a way as to fit the scale of organisation to the conditions of supply. Cash crops, such as cotton and ground-nuts are all sold to the state procurement agency (apart from a small amount that teams are allowed to keep for their members' own use). The proportion of grain to be sold is agreed in advance when the annual plan is fixed. It is worked out in such a way as to leave enough for home consumption if the plan is fulfilled. Thus a short-fall squeezes consumption, unless it can be shown to be due to 'natural disasters', in which case the deliveries are waived, and if necessary relief supplies provided by the authorities. There is no private trade in the staple crops.

A net-work of Supply and Marketing Co-operatives covers the whole country (these came into existence immediately after the land reform, before agricultural co-operatives had been established). They provide a

channel through which both teams and households can sell meat, eggs, vegetables, sauces, wine and so forth, for retailing within the village or supply to neighbouring towns. Minor raw materials, such as hog bristles are supplied to industry. These sales take place at fixed prices.

Finally, there are local fairs where free-market prices prevail according to conditions of supply and demand. Here a team may send in a cart-load of vegetables; households may dispose of small packets of produce—tobacco leaf, eggs and so forth. (It is reckoned that sales from households do not provide more than 10 per cent of total supplies in the nation as a whole). The Supply and Marketing Co-operative runs a restaurant on market day.

The regular supply of vegetables to cities is organised through contracts with particular communes which specialise in market-gardening. Vegetable production involves hard work all the year round and is rewarded with correspondingly higher earnings. The contracts therefore are a much valued privilege. Each town is surrounded by a ring of market gardens. An overall contract for the year is negotiated between the city wholesale agency and a commune. The commune distributes it to its member teams, who enter into detailed agreements with the retail agents in the town. Then the team delivers every day to the shops and street-corner stands. Procurement prices are settled in advance, but selling prices to the public vary with supplies. In the summer flush fruit and vegetables are almost given away. Thus the city makes a loss in the summer, but this is recouped by profits in the early spring. The farmer has the benefit

of a secure outlet, the public has the benefit of untrammelled supplies, and the city breaks even.

SOCIAL SERVICES

The commune provides its members with the 'five guarantees'—food, clothing, shelter, medical care and funeral expenses. A family which has too little labour-power to provide for itself, old people left without relatives, and so forth, are helped from the welfare fund of the team to which they are attached.

There are primary schools in every village; I was told that all children at the age of seven go to school and that the parents are so keen on education that they see to it that all stay the course. There are secondary schools in each district. About one in six of the children goes on to secondary school. At present very few go away for further education to the cities. As the pyramid is built up from the bottom the number will increase.

There is a hospital in most communes, and clinics at the brigade or team level. The provision for these services is partly from commune funds and partly from government. Sometimes only the school house is provided (in an old temple or ex-landlord's house) while teachers are paid by the county and parents have to supply books. Sometimes the whole is paid from the welfare fund of the teams or from profits of commune enterprises. Sometimes doctors are paid and drugs supplied from the welfare funds. Sometimes the salaries are paid by the country. Sometimes the commune cannot do any more than invite doctors in and let them charge the households for their services. It is characteristic of Chinese administration, from the earliest times, to avoid cut and dried legal schemes of

rights and obligations. Now the communes do what they can and the gaps are covered where necessary from outside.

VISITING COMMUNES

I was able to fill in a good deal of detail in the above sketch on a series of visits to a dozen communes in seven different districts.

A foreign visitor, depending on an interpreter who is only a little less foreign in the back areas, making each visit for no more than five or six hours, naturally can get only some superficial impressions. I offer them for whatever they may be worth.

On the sophisticated, prosperous market gardens near Peking, showing visitors round is just a chore, but in the country they like to make an occasion of it. We sit round a table loaded with fruit and sip tea (or hot water as a symbol of tea) while a spokesman gives us an account of the structure and achievements of the commune. The headquarters of one commune is in an old temple, more often it is an ex-landlord's house, sometimes a new building. The spokesman may be the Party secretary, the Director of the commune, or the leader of one of the brigades—an ex-poor peasant whose ability and devotion has established a position of leadership, an ex-schoolmaster from the city, or a young fellow trained in the cadre's school. When the leader is a woman no one makes any particular point of it. (In China, it seems, the rule that women are news no longer applies.)

The figures are given in a set form but our questions are answered readily. Only once was there a slogan-monger in charge of the meeting who replied with ready-made phrases about the Leadership Chairman

Mao and the Communist Party, the Three Red Banners and all that. We noticed that the atmosphere in that commune seemed a bit slack. There were even flies in the room!

Usually the spokesman is frank and articulate. Generally the sense of our questions is picked up even when our town-bred interpreter does not understand them himself. Sometimes there is confusion and a lot of argument we cannot follow before an answer emerges, generally because our questions were not clearly put.

After the preliminary meeting, we are taken round the fields and work shops, and visit some houses.

There has been a lot of building. It was a proud count of the number of 'dormitories', i.e. dwelling rooms, built in 1958 that gave rise to the horror-comic story about families being broken up, which the Russians are now repeating. Round Peking houses are built of brick and commune members who know the trade can earn from their neighbours as bricklayers, but in the country districts building is in traditional style and any family can put up their own house as soon as they can afford to buy the timber and the tiles. The vegetable garden and the pigsty at the bottom of the yard provide the family with some produce over and above what they can get from their private plot. (The private plots are allotted by the team and must not occupy more than 7 per cent of the team's land.)

The usual pattern of family life is for three generations to share a house. When we drop in, granny is at home with the babies while the young couple are both out at work and the older children at school. The supply of grannies to do the cooking no doubt

accounts for the fact that the canteens did not prove popular. Perhaps they will be revived in the future when the present generation of active public-spirited girls are the grandmothers.

There are remnants of 'feudal thinking' still; one of the tasks of the leader of the woman's group is to settle family disputes where the mother-in-law wants to bully the young wife in the old-fashioned style and the husband, in the old style, sides with his mother instead of trying to teach her the new ways.

BRIGADES AND TEAMS

The advantage of making the team the accounting unit for the distribution of income is that it increases individual incentive and eases the strain on management. Where one of the co-operatives, however, had sufficient experience, devotion and ability to continue to manage itself satisfactorily, there are obvious advantages in the brigade which it now forms carrying on as an accounting unit. In my small sample, I found three cases of this kind. In each case, natural leaders had come up from the local people (one of them was a 'hero of labour' who had twice been invited to Peking to be honoured) and there was a general atmosphere of pride and enthusiasm.

At the other extreme, we happened upon a commune that is politically rather 'backward', though it is fairly prosperous because it grows cotton and has a cash income per head well above average. Here it appeared that the teams were based upon the old 'lower-form co-operatives' that existed before 1956 and the later developments had not really struck root. The teams ran the breeding station and the primary schools. The brigades appeared to be a mere

formality, and the staff of the commune were all paid officials. The commune, however, had entered into a scheme with two of its neighbours for water control in the area, which had much improved their productivity.

Another in my sample conformed exactly to the standard pattern, with appropriate activities at each level—household, team, brigade and commune, topped by a machine shop with its own miniature blast furnace.

On a market-garden near Peking the brigades are the accounting units. I somehow had the impression that the atmosphere was more businesslike and less democratic than in the deep country, which paid off in the high level of prosperity of the households.

The general scheme is a convenient framework within which great variety can develop according to the historical, geographical and economic conditions in each district.

SAVING LAND

In the crumbling loess country round Yenan (where the cave-house in which Chairman Mao lived is an object of pilgrimage) whole valleys have been saved from erosion and flooding by terracing the hillsides in the manner used since ancient times in the south. The hill tops, which still yield a miserable, back-breaking crop, are to be planted with orchards and coppices.

In a wet plain south of Taiyuan, the commune had cut a drainage canal twenty kilometres long. In the hills to the north a reservoir and pumping station will irrigate a formerly useless area. Everywhere dirt tracks have been turned into truckable roads.

Such works are organised by the communes. In the slack season there is labour-power running to waste. Plans are worked out by experts whose services are provided as part of their normal duties. Outside expenses may be levied from the accumulation fund of teams in proportion to the area of land that will be benefited, or paid from the commune's own fund, amassed from the profits of its enterprises. The labour force is mobilised, each team helping the others, with volunteers from town (who perhaps are doing their own souls more good than they contribute to the job) and the work of a few months makes a permanent addition to the wealth of each team by increasing the productivity of the land that each has to cultivate.

This, like the trading and the social security system in the communes, is an example of how economic common sense can take command when it is freed from the complications and contradictions of a market economy.

DEMOCRACY

Is economic efficiency paid for by political regimentation? In one sense, of course, the Party is keeping a tight grip upon the system. But in another sense there is a kind of grass-roots democracy giving the peasants a say in their own affairs, which certainly did not exist before. For instance, the system of job-evaluation by which work points are alloted to various tasks has to be satisfactory to the public opinion of the workers. The Party and the commune staff want to avoid dissatisfaction which would impair efficiency, and so they must see to it that the opinion of the team members is taken into account. In this, and many such details of organisation, the leadership

depends upon the goodwill of the rank and file. Where things have gone wrong, the trouble is usually attributed to young know-alls among the cadres trying to boss the peasants.

The commune system provides a daily education in the scientific approach to technical problems, in economic calculation, and in political organisation. Personal ability and ambition has scope to express itself in more constructive ways than the desperate acquisitiveness of the individual peasant.

There are no police on the communes, and the lads are learning rifle shooting in the militia. The Party, evidently, is not able to push these people anywhere that it cannot persuade them to go.