

# China Policy Study Group

# BROADSHEET

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## HO CHI MINH

1890-1969

revolutionary fighter  
against imperialism,  
mourned by the militant  
and the oppressed

### PAPER DOVE

Nixon's recent visit to Asia, and recent statements, have given rise to speculation that Washington may after all be in the process of formulating a new China policy.

A little consideration will show this view to be totally illusory. The U.S. has changed none of the long-term goals either of its China policy or its Asia policy. It cannot possibly do so while remaining the leading force of Western imperialism.

The U.S. continues its illegal occupation of Chinese territory, Taiwan. Nor will it renounce its opposition to China at the United Nations. From Japan to Thailand a ring of bomber bases with nuclear weapons menaces China, while the Seventh Fleet remains on the prow in the Taiwan Straits.

In Vietnam, whose ties with China are as 'lips to teeth,' the abomination of U.S. aggression continues. The equivalent of two atom bombs on the Hiroshima and Nagasaki scale is being dropped weekly on South Vietnam. In Indonesia Nixon gives words of encouragement to Suharto and Nasution, murderers of their own people.

Manila, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Seoul and New Delhi evidence the same pattern; assistance and comfort for ruling cliques whose main preoccupation is to stamp out the fires of revolutionary movements at home, while sustaining a crude anti-China policy abroad, thus assuring themselves of Washington's — and Moscow's — bounty and patronage.

Why does Nixon seek to give a new look to the old policy? Because it is completely discredited and suffering defeat. Reeling under the hammer blows of the heroic people of Vietnam; an unvarying target of hatred and contempt elsewhere in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and increasingly in Europe as well; threatened at home by a rising tide of potentially revolutionary discontent, U.S. imperialism seeks a breathing spell. But the basic policy cannot change. It must however be disguised for the masses. The clue to Mr. Nixon's search for a new dovish image lies here.

## CENTRALISM WITH DEMOCRACY

Within the ranks of the people, we cannot do without freedom, nor can we do without discipline; we cannot do without democracy, nor can we do without centralism. This unity of democracy and centralism, of freedom and discipline, constitutes our democratic centralism. (Mao Tse-tung: *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People*).

Article Five of the Chinese Communist Party's new Constitution begins with these words: 'The organisational principle of the Party is Democratic Centralism.' Throughout its long history, the Communist Party of China has organised itself on the basis of democratic centralism; and looking back over that history it is impossible to deny that the Party has proved itself, over and over again, extraordinarily effective in accomplishing its aims. It should therefore be of value to consider this Leninist principle as a main source of the Party's strength and effectiveness.

Democratic centralism is the principle that governs relationships within a communist party. This has been so since Lenin's day; it was Lenin who realised that both democracy and centralism were absolutely essential in any party that was to make revolution and achieve socialism and communism. And today, a 'party of the Lenin type' is one whose inner organisation is based on this principle of democratic centralism. No other type of party can legitimately call itself communist, and no party that pays only lip-service to this principle can be considered truly communist.

But why democracy, and why centralism? Other parties and groups have been formed on the basis of embracing one of these and rejecting the other. There are groups (for example, those which today are associated with such spokesmen as Cohn-Bendit) that consider any kind of central control as smacking of authoritarianism, and therefore pin their faith to spontaneity. Others demand a military-type discipline as the only possible means of achieving their goal. But a true communist party cannot dispense with either discipline or spontaneity. This may appear a paradox, since these two qualities are in direct contradiction; but the contradiction is a fruitful one, which lies at the base of all effective mass action, and can give it greater power and reduce the possibility of error.

Centralism is essential to a communist party because the aims demand united action, and united action cannot conceivably be maintained by mere spontaneity. It is organisation, leadership,

direction — and discipline — that makes it possible for the mass forces of the proletariat to pursue, consistently, a single line and policy (and also, where necessary, to amend that policy and still retain unity).

But democracy is essential too, since it is the essence of communism that it should fulfill the aspirations of the masses. To permit the development of an elite within the party can only ensure the dominance of an ideology of the elite, as the recent history of the Soviet Communist Party has shown. Communism means the end of all classes, all hierarchies, and a party which is essentially hierarchical in its constitution (or which constitutes itself as a hierarchy) cannot accomplish this: it is not in the nature of a hierarchy to destroy itself. But democracy in the party should be regarded, essentially, in a more positive light, since revolutionary history has shown, consistently, that the strength of the masses only becomes finally effective when the masses are acting in their own right, as initiators and creators —

Revolutions are the festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other times are the masses of the people in a position to come forward so actively as creators of a new social order as at a time of revolution. (Lenin: *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*)

And what is true for the masses outside the party must be just as true for the masses of the membership.

Lenin made the point that 'a vanguard performs its task as a vanguard only when it is able to avoid becoming divorced from the masses it leads and is able really to lead the whole mass forward' (*On the Significance of Militant Materialism*). This Leninist emphasis on the mass roots of a communist vanguard party has received true and full recognition in China, where Mao's leadership gives first place to the mass line as the real basis of proletarian democracy. It is impossible for a communist party that does not maintain close links with the workers and poor peasants at grass-roots level to retain its

revolutionary class perspective. Without the mass line — which means, the constant flow of ideas from the masses to the party, which then analyses them, concentrates them and takes them, in a new and more effective form, back to the masses — any communist party (as the Soviet party again has clearly shown in recent years) will ossify and turn bureaucratic, corrupt and tyrannical.

## CONTRADICTIONARY CONCEPTS

It would obviously be impractical to expect that a principle which comprehends such contradictory concepts as freedom and discipline, democracy and centralism, can be put into effect through anything in the way of a tight and rigid formula. There can exist no set of rules for ensuring that democratic centralism will be maintained in any organisation; parties which lapse into authoritarianism or ultra-democracy do not do so simply because of or for lack of any particular article in their constitution. Nor is it possible constantly to retain a perfect balance between the two extremes; since the two principles involved are constantly at struggle. Communist parties reflect this struggle by emphasising at one time or another one or the other aspect.

It has been said that Liu Shao-chi's counter-revolutionary line placed such stress on party discipline that the democratic element ceased to function effectively. He spoke of the 'danger' of democratic tendencies within the party 'loosening inner-party unity and weakening the fighting will of the party'; such ideas as this led to the devitalising of party democracy — to such an extent that a fresh current of democratic thought and action had to be injected into the party *from outside*. This has been one function of China's Cultural Revolution. And since it would seem that any organisation must, at times, tend towards rigidity and over-organisation, the Cultural Revolution will stand, from now on, as an example, indeed the supreme example, of the way in which these tendencies can be effectively resisted.

## SHAM DEMOCRACY

It is to be appreciated that this concept of democracy is poles apart from the notion of liberal, parliamentary democracy current in the West. The sham of parliamentary democracy scarcely needs to be exposed; it merely presents the electoral masses with a choice between two brands of the same product, namely, bourgeois dictatorship. Only the connoisseur can tell White Horse blindfold, and five years of 'Labour' rule has surely confused all but the finest palates as to the difference between the two available brands of parliamentary government. Still, liberal bourgeois democracy does offer possibilities of self-expression and even of influence to a *section* of the population — that section which is permitted a certain social standing by virtue of its financial stake in the society and its thorough education and indoctrination in the standards of the society. This, of course, is the so-called 'open society' upon which Western liberals are nowadays so fond of congratulating themselves. Communist democracy, on the other hand, refuses to grant special opportunities to any privileged stratum — it is democracy for the masses, and seeks to spread as widely as possible among the masses the opportunities of self-expression and influence.

But all this must not lead us to undervalue the principle of centralism. As Lenin pointed out (in *Left-Wing Communism*), without 'an iron party tempered in the struggle . . . it is impossible to conduct such a struggle successfully.' And, with the great years that followed 1917 in mind, he wrote :

Certainly, almost everyone now realises that the Bolsheviks could not have maintained themselves in power for two and a half months, let alone two and a half years, unless the strictest, truly iron discipline had prevailed in our Party . . .

Mao Tse-tung is explicit on this point. '(The) Communist Party not only needs democracy but needs centralisation even more' (*Rectify the Party's Style of Work*). Thus, in democratic centralism, 'the minority is subordinate to the majority, the lower level to the higher level, the part to the whole and the entire membership to the Central Committee.'

However, such subordination cannot be absolute, or we should be presented with an absolute hierarchy. And what is to be done, for example, when the line adopted by the Central Committee is incorrect? We have seen incorrect lines adopted and carried through by Central Committees right across Europe and beyond, so the question is not an academic one. It would seem fair to say that at this point, the democratic aspect must become dominant — in other words the party needs democracy even more.

## LISTEN TO THE MASSES

It is interesting to note that the Ninth Congress of the Communist Party of China, in introducing a new Party Constitution (prepared, in the most democratic manner, on the basis of thousands of drafts from revolutionary committees, party branches, P.L.A. units, etc., with the masses given the opportunity of thorough discussion of the subsequent draft), has put forward entirely new formulations aimed at reinforcing the democratic character of the party. Again, it is necessary to stress that no set of written rules can ensure democracy; but the new Constitution was prepared in the spirit of the Cultural Revolution and is indeed a direct political result of that revolution. It can therefore be read as a crystallisation of the situation existing in the Chinese Party at the present time.

Article Five deserves careful study. This provides specifically that leading bodies of the party are to 'listen constantly to the opinions of the masses both inside and outside the party, and accept their supervision.' If a party member holds a different view with regard to the directives and decisions of the party organisations, he is allowed the right to reserve his views, and 'the right to bypass the immediate leadership and report directly to higher levels . . .'

This can be read as a sign that, in the present period, the Chinese Communist Party — without in any sense departing from centralism — may, in response to an upsurge of disciplined initiative on the part of the masses, be tending to emphasise the 'democracy' aspect of democratic centralism. However that may be, the drafters of the Constitution stress the need to 'create a political situation in which there are both centralism and democracy, both discipline and freedom, both unity of will and personal ease of mind and liveliness'.

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# NEW STAGE — NEW CONSTITUTION

The Constitution adopted by the Ninth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party on 14th April, 1969, is the fifth in the history of the Party—1921, 1928, 1945, 1956, 1969. Each reflected the political situation in the country and the stage reached by the Revolution. In 1921 at the formation of the CPC the model was the Soviet Bolshevik Party; in 1928 the Constitution was re-drawn in the light of the experience of the betrayal by Chiang Kai-shek of the united front; in 1945 the Japanese invader had been defeated and the final struggle for liberation was about to begin; by 1956, seven years after the setting up of the People's Republic of China, agriculture had advanced to the stage of co-operatives over most of the country (to be followed in two years by the People's Communes), and industry was being changed over from private to joint state-private ownership. By 1969 the socialist transformation of the economic base had been virtually accomplished and, through the Cultural Revolution, a new way had been found to bring about ideological transformation essential for socialist consolidation and advance. The struggles which accompanied these achievements continued both inside and outside the Communist Party and, as became clear during the Cultural Revolution, were struggles for or against socialism.

A few necessarily brief comparisons of the 1945, 1956, and 1969 Constitutions reveal the nature of the class struggle at each stage, and the changing balance of class forces.

## STAGES OF STRUGGLE

In 1945, because China was still a 'semi-colonial and semi-feudal society . . . the Chinese revolution' was 'directed against imperialism and feudalism'. The main contradiction was therefore that of the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal forces united under the Chinese Communist Party against their internal and external enemies (see the 1945 constitution). In 1949 a qualitative change took place with the setting up of the People's Republic of China:

'The great victories of the Chinese people's war of liberation and of the people's revolution have put an end to the era of the rule of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism in China. From the status of the oppressed, the Chinese people has attained that of the master in a new society and a new state . . .' (*Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference*, adopted at the First Plenary Session, 12th September, 1949).

From then onward the main contradiction was that between the proletariat and their revolutionary allies striving for socialism, led by Mao Tse-tung, against reactionaries and revisionists both inside and outside China. State power was in the hands of 'the people's democratic united front composed of the Chinese working class, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, national bourgeoisie and other patriotic democratic elements, based on the alliance of workers and peasants and led by the working class (*Common Programme*). The Preamble of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, adopted 20th September, 1954, by the First National People's Congress, reaffirms the position of the working class as the leading force—under the guidance of the Communist Party—to ensure 'the gradual abolition of systems of exploitation and the building of a socialist society'. This step-by-step advance towards socialism was accomplished in the course of sharp class struggles.

The 1956 Party Constitution, however, does not reflect the reality of the class struggles, simply observing that, for 'complete victory for the great cause of socialism . . . the Party must continue to pay attention to the elimination of capitalist factors and influence . . . and make determined efforts to mobilise and unite all the positive forces throughout the

country'. The main task of the Communist Party was said to be:

'by continuously adopting correct methods to transform what now remains of capitalist ownership into ownership by the whole people, transform what remains of individual ownership by the working masses, uproot the system of exploitation and remove all the causes that give rise to such a system.'

This reads like a programme of peaceful transition to the state of the whole people, ignoring class struggle.

## CONTINUING REVOLUTION

Between 1956 and 1969 the clear analyses by the Chinese Communist Party in the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute and the Cultural Revolution exposed the fallacy of 'the state of the whole people' in the period of socialism, when classes, class contradictions and class conflicts continue. By contrast with the 1956 document, the 1969 Constitution states:

'The basic programme of the Communist Party of China is the complete overthrow of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in place of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the triumph of socialism over capitalism. The ultimate aim of the Party is the realisation of Communism.'

Even though the 1956 document says that 'the aim of the Party is the achievement of socialism and communism', it still needed a Cultural Revolution to make clear to everyone the real meaning of Lenin's statement that 'the main question of every revolution is, undoubtedly, the question of state power. In the hands of which class power is—this decides everything' (*One of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution*, 1917). In his *Report to the Ninth Congress* Lin Piao reiterated this point: 'The fundamental question in the current great revolution in the realm of the superstructure is the question of political power, a question of which class holds leadership.' And the 1969 Constitution emphasises the point when it refers explicitly to 'the threat of subversion and aggression by imperialism and modern revisionism', stating that 'only by depending on the Marxist theory of continued revolution and on practice under its guidance' can the proletariat win the struggle 'against the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes'.

## MASS SUPERVISION

The theoretical basis on which the Chinese Communist Party relies was set out in all three Constitutions. In 1945 it was said: 'The Communist Party of China guides its entire work by the teachings which unite the theories of Marxism-Leninism with the actual practice of the Chinese Revolution—the Thought of Mao Tse-tung.' But in 1956 there is no reference to Mao's Thought or to Mao, the Constitution merely stating: 'The Communist Party of China takes Marxism-Leninism as its guide to action.' In 1969 the Constitution states: 'The Communist Party of China takes Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought as the theoretical basis of its thinking. Mao Tse-tung Thought is Marxism-Leninism of the era in which capitalism is heading for total collapse and socialism is advancing to world-wide victory.'

In all three Constitutions the basic organisational principle is declared to be democratic centralism and individual members are given the right to criticise Party organisations and cadres. Similarly, they have the right to submit any appeal or complaint up to and including the Central Committee. They are also urged to maintain close links with working people outside the Party, to listen to them, and consult with them. The real difference lies, not in the wording of the three Constitutions, but

in the possibility of realising their intentions. As Mao said in February 1967:

'In the past we waged struggles in rural areas, in factories, in the cultural field, and we carried out the socialist education movement. But all this failed to solve the problem because we did not find a form, a method, to arouse the broad masses to expose our dark aspect openly, in an all-round way and from below.'

The experience of millions who have taken a personal part in the Cultural Revolution and in the creation of the Constitution guarantees that the provisions of the 1969 Constitution will be carried out, and that Party members and bodies will be supervised by the masses. An important detail introduced in 1969 is the stipulation that before an applicant can be admitted to the Party, 'the opinions of the broad masses inside and outside the Party' must be obtained.

In the field of foreign relations there is a striking difference between the 1956 and 1969 Constitutions. In 1956 it was stated:

'The Communist Party of China advocates a foreign policy directed to the safeguarding of world peace and the achievement of peaceful co-existence between countries with different systems. The Party stands for the establishment and development of diplomatic, economic and cultural relations between China and other countries of the world . . . It supports all efforts made by the peoples and governments of other countries to uphold peace . . . and expresses its

## A READER'S CRITICISM

A reader has sent some criticism of our August article, 'Besieging the Cities'.

One of the main points at issue concerns the relationship of the revolutionary struggle in the 'cities' of the world (the capitalist countries of North America and Europe) and in the 'countryside' (Africa, Asia and Latin America). Our correspondent says that the writer of the article seems confused by two formulations made by Lin Piao on two different occasions.

(1) Since World War II, the proletarian revolutionary movement has for various reasons been temporarily held back in the North American and West European capitalist countries, while the people's revolutionary movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America has been growing vigorously. (*Long Live the Victory of People's War, 1965*)

(2) An unprecedentedly gigantic revolutionary mass movement has broken out in Japan, Western Europe and North America, the 'heartlands' of capitalism. More and more people are awakening. (*Report to the Ninth Congress, 1969*)

Both formulations are correct, says our critic, and reflect different stages in the struggle. To stress the first while ignoring the second leads to misunderstanding of Lin Piao's central thesis and the full implications of the Report are not brought out. It is the *interaction* of the struggle in the colonial and semi-colonial countries with that of the capitalist countries which is significant.

Our August article said: 'the western bastions of capitalism and imperialism will not fall, will not even be directly threatened, until the struggle in the "countryside" reaches a much higher level — i.e. until the "countryside" falls into the hands of the highly conscious revolutionary people. Looking at matters in this light, nobody could have made the mistake of regarding last year's event in Paris as presaging the fall of the cities.'

But, says our critic, although the people of the three con-

tinents are being rapidly revolutionised there is no question of waiting for the 'countryside'; it is up to revolutionaries in the West to make a living application of Mao's Thought to their own problems. The events in Paris surely showed that however great the dissatisfaction of the people, no basic change can be made if there is no party with a correct line and having the confidence of the people — even though the system may be directly threatened, as de Gaulle's massive call-up of armed forces and secret arrangements with Bonn made evident.

But in 1969 we read:

'The Communist Party of China upholds proletarian internationalism; it firmly unites with the genuine Marxist-Leninist parties and groups the world over, unites with the proletariat, the oppressed people and nations of the whole world and fights together with them to overthrow imperialism headed by the United States, modern revisionism with the Soviet revisionist renegade clique as its centre and the reactionaries of all countries, and to abolish the system of exploitation of man by man on the globe, so that all mankind will be emancipated.'

In 1945 China's anti-imperialist and anti-feudal forces were united under the Communist Party against their external and internal enemies. From 1949 the class struggle, both inside and outside the Party, became that between the proletariat and their revolutionary allies striving for socialism and led by Mao, and the anti-socialist reactionaries and revisionists led by Liu Shao-chi. It is this struggle that was reflected in the 1956 Constitution, which bears strong marks of the revisionism of the 20th CPSU Congress. By 1969 the rebellion of China's revolutionary people, guided by Mao, against counter-revolutionaries, had made possible the proletarian Constitution adopted by the Ninth Congress.

Our correspondent feels that the reference to 'wealth percolating downwards' clouds the argument. The gravy from exploitation at home and abroad, he says, goes into the same pocket. Keynesian fiddling, especially consumer debt, creates the illusion of affluence. The bourgeoisification of the working class is primarily ideological. We are dealing with moribund capitalism in the West and the objective conditions for revolution are there, and have been since World War I.

The article states that Lin Piao's 1969 Report 'can scarcely be read as an attempt to give direct leadership to the international movement'. Our critic disagrees.

After analysing the four main contradictions in the world today, Lin Piao states clearly the international anti-imperialist anti-revisionist policy of the Chinese Party and Government and clearly shows the way:

All countries and people subjected to aggression, control, intervention or bullying by U.S. imperialism and Soviet revisionism, unite and form the broadest possible united front and overthrow our common enemies.'

Whether the war gives rise to revolution or revolution prevents the war, U.S. imperialism and Soviet revisionism will not last long! Workers of all countries, unite! Proletarians and oppressed people and nations of the world, unite! Bury U.S. imperialism, Soviet revisionism and their lackeys!

This, our correspondent says, is not rhetoric.

*We would welcome readers' views and other comments.*