

China Policy Study Group

BROADSHEET

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SYMBOLIC SMOG

In the 50's and 60's, as part of the Cold War strategy, various international bodies were set up by the rich capitalist countries, ostensibly to help the 'backward' countries 'take off' in their economic development. But the Second World Food Congress of the Food and Agriculture Organisation was told in June that the gap between rich and poor countries continues to widen. Worse still, in India, which has had a lion's share of aid from many international bodies, as well as from individual Western countries and the U.S.S.R., the internal gap is also widening. India, which used to be cited, against China, as a model Asian democracy, fails to feed her population, while China succeeds.

Recently another Asian country, capitalist Japan, has won praise from the West for its very rapid economic growth. But inseparable from this Japanese 'miracle' is increasing militarisation, and erosion of traditional Japanese culture by the worst aspects of U.S. commercialism. The fact that Tokyo's smog is comparable with that of New York and Los Angeles is symbolic.

Specialists are engaged in study and discussion at international meetings of the many problems of technological development in the capitalist countries. They are concerned with the growth of violence, crime, mental illness, drug addiction and alcoholism. They analyse and propose solutions, but even the most optimistic do not see the future as bright. Those who used to look to Russia for solutions to all problems have long been disillusioned, since even the most basic problems remain unsolved. Soviet agriculture, for example, as the main article in this issue shows, is in perennial crisis. In all these countries young people are alienated from and reject a society that regards them primarily as consumers or cannon-fodder.

Experts analyse, but fail to diagnose the root causes. China, as another article in this issue points out, is set on a different road—one in which individuals are valued and called on to play their essential part in collectively creating a new, truly socialist society. It is only in this way that the quality of human life can be safeguarded and enriched.

DEVELOPING SOCIALIST AGRICULTURE: USSR and China compared

Two recent articles by Soviet authors, V. Matskevitch and A. Yemelyanov, provide an insight into current U.S.S.R. policy on agriculture and the relations between town and country, and make a comparison with Chinese developments in this field possible.

At the Soviet Communist Party's 22nd Congress in 1961, Khrushchev promised that the material and technical basis for communism would be built within two decades. This, he said, would make it possible gradually to convert socialist relations of production into communist relations, to create a classless society, to erase the essential distinctions between town and country. He assured the Congress that 'within the next ten years all sections of the Soviet people will already enjoy sufficiency and will be well provided for' and 'within the next few years all sections of the population will get good, high quality foodstuffs'.

Marking time

However, in March, 1965, Brezhnev had to report to the C.P.S.U. Central Committee that 'during the seven-year period from 1959 to 1965 inclusive, state agricultural production was to have increased by 70%. In actual fact, however, the increase for the first six of these seven years had amounted to 10% . . . In the last five years the increase had been only 1.9% annually . . . If our agriculture made headway before 1959, it actually marked time in the years that followed'.

The shortfall apparently affected every branch of agricultural output. Brezhnev announced that the 1965 target for internal purchases of grain would be cut from 65.5 million tons to 55.7 million tons, which figure was to remain unchanged up to and including 1970.

The Central Committee's resolution admitted to 'the squandering of land' and Brezhnev's report to a fall in the rate of increase in numbers of cattle, 'a considerable decline in the number of sheep, pigs and poultry and a fall in the amount of milk obtained per cow on collective and state farms'. The Yaroslavl region, for example, home of a famous breed, had only 186,000 sheep compared with the pre-war 470,000.

Brezhnev explained that in the Smolensk region production of principal

field crops had not even reached pre-war levels. 'We have difficulties', he said, 'in keeping up the normal supplies of buckwheat, millet and rice.' In several important buckwheat areas, acreages, sown to buckwheat had fallen drastically. In some regions, areas under millet had dropped variously to a quarter, a third and a sixth of that in 1932. 'During the last five years', Brezhnev stated, 'we have been forced to import almost 1½ million tons of rice.'

The two articles cited above, and other reports from Soviet sources, suggest that the decline in agriculture manifest in 1965 has not been arrested.

In dealing with differences between town and countryside, Khrushchev's successors have not departed from his basic premise that 'Communist social relations evolve in the process of work, in the process of developing production' and that 'further advance to a classless society is bound up, above all, with the rapid growth of the production forces'.

In developing socialist agriculture and reducing differences between town and countryside, the Chinese, putting politics in command, see people and their political consciousness as the key factor; the Soviet leaders, on the other hand, see material incentives, mechanisation, efficient management and the use of specialists as the essentials. Such policies not only fail to achieve their stated purpose of raising productivity and the standard of living—so much is clear from the record—more seriously, they create attitudes of mind inimical to communism.

Why the slowdown?

Brezhnev's 1965 report did not attribute the failure of Soviet agriculture to an erroneous political line. The slowdown had happened, he said, 'because the economic laws guiding the development of the socialist economy had not been given due consideration and sometimes had even been ignored'.

In 1970 Minister of Agriculture Matskevich still regards strict observance of 'the main economic laws' and 'the principle of material incentives for the collective farmers and workers on the state farms' as the key to success. He stresses the need for more up-to-date machinery and increased supplies of fertilisers and pesticides.

Essential political factors are equally ignored by Yemelyanov, on the question of eliminating the differences between town and countryside:

'The turning of farms into a variety of industrial work means switching agriculture on to industrial lines and making use of the achievements of scientific and technical progress on a wide scale.'

In effect, he is advocating not the raising of the political consciousness of the collective farmer but merely a further mechanisation of agriculture.

The Soviet collective farm, being simply a unit of production, differs radically in its political, social and economic character from the Chinese people's commune. When formed in 1958, these represented an advance from co-operative farming to a higher form of collective ownership.

'Combining industry, agriculture, trade, education and military affairs and combining farming, forestry, animal husbandry, side-occupations and fishing, the people's commune has some of the elements of ownership by the whole people.'

('The Road Forward for China's Socialist Agriculture', *Peking Review*, 13th February, 1970, p. 5).

The Chinese have never underrated the importance of mechanising agriculture, but they did not allow the absence of machinery to stand in the way of co-operativisation. In Mao's words, 'With conditions as they are in our country, co-operation must precede the use of big machinery'.

Indigenous equipment

Lacking the massive supplies of tractors and other equipment necessary for a country of China's size, the peasants themselves, especially from the Great Leap Forward (1958) onwards, adapted and developed indigenous equipment and displayed great ingenuity in devising farm machinery for the semi-mechanisation of agriculture. At the same time industrial production of agricultural machinery, especially tractors, suitable for Chinese conditions was stepped up.

Soviet leaders, the Chinese say, see only the material factor and not the human factor; no machinery can get them out of their agricultural difficulties; machinery needs man to make it and operate it: without men good machines are only a pile of iron.

The dangers inherent in this over-reliance on mechanisation are evident from Brezhnev's report of 24th March, 1965:

'Owing to the insufficient number of combines and other machinery, the harvesting of cereals not infrequently takes from 30 to 40 days, causing great losses in the harvest.'

More than any other aspect of rural development, self-reliance is a touchstone for comparing the socialist consciousness of Chinese commune members and of Soviet collective farmers.

Since 1958, and more markedly since the Cultural Revolution, communes, production brigades and even production teams have taken the initiative to afforest their land, prevent soil erosion, make alkaline lands fertile, cultivate wasteland, build irrigation and water-conservancy works. All this work, which has enormously increased production, has been carried out (either on their own or in co-operation with neighbouring communes) with little or no state or expert aid.

State aid

In the U.S.S.R., Brezhnev had in 1965 said of the 300 million hectares of hayfields and pasture: 'a considerable part of them is neglected. Much can be accomplished by the collective and state farms themselves, but obviously the state will also have to assist. . . . From this year the state is assuming the cost of liming and land reclamation work'. But in November, 1969, Dmitry Polyansky, First Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers, in his report to the Third Congress of Collective Farmers, had to admit that 'improvement work has been carried out only on an exceedingly small part of the land'.

In China, without waiting for state aid, the communes have built hydro-electric stations as part of their water-control schemes, often making their own pumps, turbines and other equipment.

By contrast, in the Soviet Union, the construction of big power stations has meant little in benefits to the rural areas.

'Gigantic power stations have been built in our country in recent years yet 12% of our collective farms still have no electricity supply even for lighting purposes. Agriculture consumes only 4% of the electricity generated in the country, of which only 2% is used for production purposes.' (Brezhnev, 24th March, 1965.)

To remedy the situation, says Brezhnev,

'The State Planning Committee, the State Committee for Power and Electrification and the Ministry of Agriculture must be asked to prepare a programme.'

Yuri Andreyev, who specialises in anti-China slanders, sees the policy of self-reliance as antithetical to socialism:

'The (Chinese) peasants are exhorted to raise output with their own resources. They are advised not to pin their hopes on mechanisation and to use what means they have to dig canals and ponds, and expand the area under crops and even build small power stations.'

(*New Times*, Nos. 18-19, 1970.)

Last autumn, Jan Myrdal and his wife returned to Liu Ling in Northern Shensi, described in his 'Report from a Chinese Village' based on observations in 1962-1963. He found that the Liu Ling brigade had accumulated collective funds of 160,000 yuan and a reserve stock amounting to 75 tons of grain in preparedness against war and natural disasters, tremendous achievements for a community of only 161 families.

As Myrdal explains (*Look*, 10th February, 1970), Liu Ling is situated in a poor and underdeveloped part of China. In many other areas the accumulation fund and grain reserves would be considerably higher. Tachai is the outstanding case of a grain-deficient commune becoming first self-sufficient and then grain-exporting — all by the peasants' own efforts. Tachai's example has been followed all over China and communes which in the past relied on grain from outside can now provide for themselves, put aside a reserve and, in many cases, even sell surpluses to the state. But in the U.S.S.R., 'Many collective farms are now deeply in debt to the state and this hinders their work . . . the Presidium of the C.P.S.U. Central Committee considers it possible to write off their debts.' (Brezhnev, March, 1965).

Supply problem

In discussions on Soviet agriculture, the problem of ensuring adequate supplies of vegetables and fruit for the towns constantly recurs. Polyansky, in his 1969 report, rejected a proposal to restrict the rights of collective farms and individual collective farmers to sell on the free markets. 'This . . . would affect the supply of fresh vegetables and other agricultural products for the urban population.'

One of the achievements of China's Great Leap Forward was the remarkable improvement in supplies of fruit and vegetables to the cities. In fact the town-dweller in China today is guaranteed a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables comparable with, if not surpassing, any city in the world. And at rock-bottom prices. This has been accomplished without massive state involvement. The citizens of Peking, Shanghai and other towns themselves planted fruit trees in their hundreds of thousands on the outskirts of their cities in 1958 and 1959, and throughout the country hillsides were cleared for the planting of orchards. Fruit and vegetable communes were set up in an inner ring around every major town, with an outer ring producing grains and other staples. The result has been a remarkable improvement in standards of living and the quality of diet of townspeople over the last 12 years.

The mass line of relying 'on the great mass of the former semi-proletarian poor peasants' stands in striking contrast to the insistence throughout Soviet policy of reliance on the

specialists. The U.S.S.R. six-year purchase plan introduced in 1965 was important, said Brezhnev, because it would 'free the initiative of the specialists and farm managers and enable them to display their abilities and their economic initiative'. But at the same time 'there must be a resolute fight to strengthen labour and state discipline on the collective and state farms'. This sentence is repeated four years later in the 'Model Rules of the Collective Farm' adopted at the end of 1969 which, according to Polyansky, 'provide for measures to be taken against persons who are guilty of breaches of discipline and established procedure and against workers who are not conscientious'.

How strange all this would sound to the peasants of a Chinese commune managing their own affairs through their revolutionary committees.

To encourage state and collective farms to increase sales to the state over and above their quotas, Brezhnev in 1965 announced a 50% increase in the prices for wheat and rye. To increase production of buckwheat, millet and rice he suggested 'a good purchasing price' as an incentive.

Meat 'unprofitable'

To meet the problem of falling output, the Soviet leaders rely to an ever-increasing extent on profits and material incentives. According to Brezhnev, one reason for the decline in animal husbandry was that it was 'unprofitable' on many collective and state farms . . . 'the more meat a farm produces, the greater is its loss'.

Despite the increased material incentives introduced five years ago, Yemelyanov in May, 1970, refers to the fact that 'in a number of districts the farms are not very willing to increase the output of livestock products. . . . The number of pigs in the country is known to have dwindled in recent years'.

From every quarter of China reports show that production brigades and teams are taking steps to increase the quantity and variety of their livestock. The growth in the numbers of pigs and poultry is particularly rapid and the widespread development of fishbreeding is very striking.

When the communes were formed, work done was paid for under a points system based on category of labour and number of days worked. This system was criticised during the Cultural Revolution as being a form of piecework. To put 'work points

in command' and rely mainly on material incentives was bound to stimulate capitalist tendencies.

Today the people's communes guarantee all members a basic quantity of staple food which is supplemented by payment for work done. Detailed book-keeping is thus dispensed with and accounts are kept only of days worked. Work is assessed at an open yearly meeting when each member evaluates what he considers his workday to be worth. Assessments are discussed until unanimous decisions are reached.

The differences between town and countryside in China have been a narrowed step by step from land reform to the Cultural Revolution.

'The collective ownership of the people's communes needs to undergo a process of development from the elementary to the higher stage, all the more so for collective ownership to advance to ownership by the whole people . . .

'The process of carrying on socialist transformation in the countryside is one of strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat in the rural areas . . . it is also a process of raising the level of production in the relatively poor production teams to that of the relatively rich production teams, and a process of gradually enlarging the accumulation funds by the communes, developing their industry, and gradually achieving the mechanisation and electrification of agriculture under conditions conforming to the country's industrialisation.'

(*Peking Review*, 13th February, 1970, p. 5.)

In the Soviet Union, schemes for more efficient management, increased mechanisation, higher profits and massive state aid cannot solve the problems of changing social relations and increasing agricultural output: they serve only to increase capitalist tendencies and a self-seeking, non-collective outlook.

'What keeps China together', says Myrdal in his recent article, 'is no longer a traditional bureaucracy or a new administration, an *apparat* where orders and commands flow along organisationally structured chains of command. It is the living study and application of Mao Tse-tung's thought that holds China together and shapes its economic development.'

References

Lines of Development of Soviet Agriculture, Vladimir Matskevich, Minister of Agriculture (*Soviet News*, 31st March, 1970).

Industrialisation of Agriculture Will Remove Differences Between Town and Countryside, A. Yemelyanov (article in *Communist*, abridged version, *Soviet News*, 19th May, 1970).

For a statement of current Chinese agricultural policy, see *The Road Forward for China's Socialist Agriculture*, by the Writing Group of the Honan Provincial Revolutionary Committee, *Peking Review*, 13th February, 1970.

AVOIDABLE HAZARDS

Acutely conscious of the physical and spiritual squalor surrounding us in the west, friends of China often express the hope that she will profit from the mistakes of our civilisation, where technical advance has so often produced ill effects that outweigh its benefits. There is, it is suggested, no need for others to repeat the errors of the countries that pioneered industrialisation.

In the west, to take one example, the recent development of transport has meant the decay of railway and canal systems, noise and foul air on all sides, the spoliation of the countryside, the destruction of fine old buildings and, in addition to all this, the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. Public transport moves us more and more slowly at greater and greater cost, while our postal system delivers letters with increasing tardiness and unreliability.

Other examples of technical advance gone wrong readily come to mind: industrial waste disposal, artificial fertilisers, weedkillers, insecticides and food additives.

In an effort to prevent the further development of such

evils, restrictive measures of one sort or another are adopted, though it is clear that many of them come too late. If towns had been more rationally planned, roads better laid out, we might, some think, have avoided present urban congestion, the slums at the centre, the endless depersonalised suburbs, the destruction of the sense of community. China, they say, starting industrialisation later, should be able to avoid these pitfalls.

Today reasoning of this sort applied to China shows a misconception both of capitalist society and of the problems of a country building socialism.

Many who can see that capitalism causes war, poverty and unemployment, do not so readily see that the troubles we have mentioned, and others like them, are not results of ill-considered industrialisation, of the misuse of the machine; they are aspects of capitalism, its physical manifestation.

Under capitalism profit-seeking creates problems which, however strong the desire to solve them, are inevitably perpetuated. Engels in *The Housing Question*, expresses this

dilemma of the would-be reformers of capitalism thus:

'It is the essence of bourgeois socialism to want to maintain the basis of all the evils of present-day society and at the same time to want to abolish the evils themselves.'

China, formerly feudal and semi-colonial, is remaking itself in the image of socialism. What is being attempted is neither the correction of past mistakes nor the avoidance of mistakes made in the west; it is the creation of a nation which—physically and mentally—shall be socialist through and through. Because the aims of socialism are entirely different from those of capitalism, so must be its methods and ideological superstructure.

The socialist road is different in every way from the capitalist one. It also is strewn with hazards, but they are different ones. It is not that the problems we see around us will be solved in China more rationally, by the exercise of greater skill and foresight—they should not arise.

Town and country

Rural areas throughout the world are in many respects badly off by comparison with the cities. Western efforts to counteract this are ineffective. Under socialism the aim is much more basic: to eliminate the distinction between mental and manual labour. One may quote *The Housing Question* again, referring to

'... the antithesis between town and country, which has been brought to an extreme point by present-day capitalist society. Far from being able to abolish this antithesis, capitalist society on the contrary is compelled to intensify it day by day.'

Mao Tse-tung's call to cadres to take part in physical labour with the peasants was not issued because of a difficult food situation nor because the cadres would bring science and culture with them, nor is its purpose to 'raise' the rural areas to the level of the towns. It is part of a plan for fighting elitism and revisionism and beginning to create a society socialist in all its parts.

The coming of the people's communes signified an important change in the social base of virtually all the peasants: they now produce collectively, having given up individual ownership of most of their land.

The peasants form the great majority of China's people, so that if an intellectual wishes to integrate himself with the masses, as Mao advises, it is to the peasants that he goes. Young persons from the towns are now settling permanently in the communes. City doctors make prolonged rural tours. They go not only to help and teach the peasants but to be helped and taught by them. Peasants have close connections with reality, take their ideas directly from practice, are very thorough in what they do, and are accustomed to 'plain living and hard struggle'. In the cultural revolution, the commune and the workshop have become laboratories where successful experiments can quickly be tried out on a larger scale. Trials can be assessed directly by the peasants or workers and need not await published reports.

Decentralisation

The west relies on highly centralised public services, on giant manufacturing plants serving vast areas. Meanwhile in China there is a great movement towards decentralisation—which some in the west would consider retrogressive. Writing in 1945 about production by the army for its own support, Mao said that this, 'though backward or retrogressive in form, is progressive in substance and of great historic significance.' China's aim, now as then, is to combine modern and indigenous

methods, a mixture of large and small plants resulting in balanced, all-round growth and encouraging self-reliance in provinces, counties, communes and individuals.

Throughout China's countryside peasants are setting up plants for making bricks, cement, fertiliser, farm tools, pumps, vehicles, even electronic apparatus. In the province of Kiangsu, for instance, more than 90 per cent of the counties and cities have chemical works, making more than 300 different products, from fertilisers and insecticides to artificial fibres, pharmaceuticals, synthetic rubber, synthetic resins and other plastics. Some of these factories may have been set up by workers from the city, but their main labour force must be recruited from the peasantry. Some peasants are therefore becoming industrial workers.

As long as the dictatorship of the proletariat lasts there must be centralised government, but in China its powers may already be tending to shrink rather than to grow as they do in the west. As Mao said, 'Without a high degree of democracy it is impossible to have a high degree of centralism, and without a high degree of centralism it is impossible to establish a socialist economy.'

When the people rule, concentration of government in a centre clearly contains a contradiction, but a wide field of action can still be left for local and individual initiative. In every field of Chinese life the cultural revolution has resulted in a re-examination of existing methods and, usually, in great simplification. Western experts in government, if they had an opportunity to study Chinese practice, might be surprised at how much is left in the hands of local government—very different from what the bourgeois press tries to convince us is typical of a planned society.

All-round development

It happens that decentralisation makes good sense from the point of view of strategy, but this is not the reason for it. It is part of a plan for all-round development, for producing new men and women, one facet of a policy for socialism. Certainly the socialist way is no straight and easy one. It has contradictions just as capitalism has, but because it serves the interests of the many rather than the few its contradictions are, in the main, non-antagonistic ones—among the people. It is in the interest of the masses that solutions to them be found, and because the masses apply their creative powers to the task solutions are being found. Mistakes are bound to be made, and sometimes the effort to put things right has to be continued over a long period. But because the masses wish for correct solutions and are concerned to find them, errors tend to get rectified quickly and with a minimum of friction.

Capitalism is surrounded with problems which it cannot solve without ceasing to be capitalist. Socialism, too, has problems, but their solution will make it more, not less, socialist.

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