

EASTERN HORIZON

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EASTERN DIARY

Fast and Slow

Things have been happening fast in China.

Following the proliferation of collectively owned and run businesses, private family businesses have also begun to appear. At least two family-run restaurants have won a write-up in the *People's Daily*, and they are said to be flourishing. One of them, operated by a young man and his sister, is said to be netting 200 yuan a month after all the costs and expenses, including the family expenses, are defrayed. To the reported clamours for legislation to control these and similar businesses, an editor added the comment, 'Yes, there should be legislation—to protect such businesses.'

Criminal investigations have been initiated over the accident which resulted in the capsizing of the off-shore drilling rig *Bohai No. 2*, resulting in the death of 72 workers and at a cost of 37 million yuan. Responsibility has been traced to the head of the Bureau of Off-shore Oil Prospecting and there are indications that this may go even higher. Two reporters of the *Workers' Daily* asserted that the accident was actually not accidental, but 'the inevitable result' of the wrong-guiding ideology and work method which the leadership of the Bureau of the Off-shore Oil Prospecting had become used to for a long time, showing a total neglect of essential safety measures and an indifference to human lives. A deaf ear had been turned to all appeals from the crew of the rig for precautionary steps to be taken before the removal of the rig.

A *People's Daily* editorial called for continuing the debate on the meaning of life started by a young woman worker, Pan Xiao, who wrote a letter to the journal *Chinese Youth* to disclose how her enthusiasm at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution had ended in depression, which still persisted. The response to the publication of this long letter a few months ago was immediate and strong, tens of thousands of letters having been received by the editorial department of *Chinese Youth*.

Now the *People's Daily* has also begun to publish such letters. It was revealed by the

State Commission of Agriculture that in 1979 the average per-capita income in 1,622 agricultural brigades had surpassed 300 yuan. It is true that the number represents only 2.3 per thousand of the 690,000 brigades in China. But this is only a beginning.

Production in the sector of heavy industry has begun to be exposed to the influence of market economy. The First Ministry of Machine-building has released the 200 categories of products manufactured in the plants under its control, with the exception of only one category (motor vehicles), from state planning and allocation. Plants producing these goods have been allowed to do their own planning in accordance with the contracts they directly sign with users, or the needs of the market.

In a front-page editorial, the *People's Daily* stressed that supervision by the people is indispensable if the Communist Party's working style is to be improved.

The personality cult suffered a severe setback when a directive of the Communist Party Central Committee put a constraint on image building through exaltation at public places and through the media for leaders past and present, especially those of the present. In front of the Tian An Men, all but one of Mao Zedong's portraits, together with his quotations, have come down. All forms of memorial structures for the dead will be severely restricted.

In the first seven months of this year, production in the light and textile industries rose by 23.3 per cent over that of the corresponding period last year. In the same period, heavy industry grew by 6.3 per cent. Collectively owned industry rose by 24.3 per cent, while that owned by the state by 11 per cent.

The state monopoly of employment and job allocation will be gradually eased. Enterprises given self-management power will be allowed to do their own hiring and firing. A growing number of people will be able to apply for jobs which they believe suit them best, and in which they can make their best contribution.

As things are happening fast, there are people who still drag their feet. But there are also people who would like to see things happening even much faster. As soon as the case of *Bohai No. 2* was revealed in the press, there have been letters to the editor which questioned why it was that no legal steps had been taken until 21 April, almost five

months after the accident. Recently it was again asked why no charges had yet been preferred, though a further four months had gone by.

Humanism and Alienation

Even more interesting is that, writing in the *People's Daily* (15 August) to refute the view held widely in China during the past two decades or so that humanism is a bourgeois and revisionist concept, Ru Xin not only called for a reassessment of humanism, but also brought out the importance of Marx's view on alienation.

Ru Xin is obviously a pen-name. But the editor of the *People's Daily* underlined the importance he attached to the article by announcing it on the paper's front page. It is important. For decades Marx's view on alienation has been all but ignored in countries where communist parties are in the leading position. In these countries, including China, it seems that this view has been considered a pre-Marxian concept which bordered on bourgeois humanism. It was only after World War II that it was resurrected by neo-Marxists in the West who found alienation more relevant to the conditions of the working class in the developed countries than blatant economic exploitation defined by Marx. It represents an important departure for the Chinese Communist Party organ to print and attach great importance to an article which aims at rehabilitating humanism and reasserting Marx's view on alienation.

Citing Marx in paraphrase from his 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844', Ru wrote:

Capitalist society represents the total forfeiture of man. Here, 'the rise in value of the world of matter and the fall in value of the world of man proceed in direct proportion.' The alienation of man has reached its apex of absurdity. The worker has turned into the slave of his own object and has to submit himself to the rule of a non-human force. The more wealth the worker produces, the more impoverished he becomes; the more merchandise he creates, the more he turns himself into cheap merchandise. Labour creates beauty, but deforms the labourer; it generates wisdom, but makes him slow-witted and dull. Such alienation is reflected not only in the results of labour, but also in the productive activities, that is in labour itself. Creative labour should be a characteristic

which differentiates man from the animal; it is precisely through creative labour that man wins freedom and all-round development, but now it has been substituted by labour which alienates man. To the labourer, labour has become a form of suffering. Instead of affirming himself through labour, he negates himself. Instead of freely developing his physical and mental powers, he sustains both physical and mental trauma.

Therefore, only when he is carrying out his function as an animal (feeding and sexual activities) can he feel that he is functioning freely as a man. On the contrary, when he is working, that is when he is carrying out his human function, he feels as if he is nothing but an animal. . . . One of man's attributes should be that he is able to take free and voluntary actions, and yet now man's activities are reduced to producing his bare means of subsistence. Thus man loses himself and his value in being a man, and becomes 'mentally and physically a dehumanized being.' Therefore, the crime of capitalism is not only the oppression and exploitation of one class by another, but, more than that, it also leads to the forfeiture and subjugation of man. It is precisely because of this that the objective of the communist revolution is not limited to the overthrow of the capitalist system and the liberation of the working class from the rule of the capitalists, but should also be the achievement of the liberation of mankind as a whole. . . . Marx said, 'Communism is the sublation of private property and the self alienation of man' . . .

Concluding the article, Ru Xin wrote:

In the final analysis, the key to the vindication of Marxist humanism lies in the emancipation of the mind. We have to break through the phobia of humanism and confidently proclaim: Communists are the most thorough humanists, for the objective of the communists' struggle, for which they are not afraid to lose their lives and shed their blood, is to build a new world for mankind, a world which is more suitable for man to live in, and in which man can really attain full freedom and all-round development, so as to become the real man, putting an end to man's 'pre-historical period'.

Recent Experience

After tracing the development of the con-

cept of humanism in Marx's works in different periods, Ru Xin wrote:

Based on the foregoing observations, I am of the opinion that we must not indiscriminately and unreservedly set Marxism against humanism, nor should we denounce without due analysis humanism in its totality as revisionist. On the other hand we must not completely identify Marxism with humanism, for Marxism is not merely concerned with the question of man. But the principle of humanism is embodied in the theory of Marxism. Without such content, Marxism could turn into its opposite, becoming a cold and dead dogma in which man does not have a place, and which could even bring about a new form of alienation that reigns over the people. Haven't we had lessons like this in the history of the international communist movement?

This remark reminds one of what happened during the Cultural Revolution. In criticizing a work on political economy by Soviet economists, Mao pointed out that man rarely figured in this work. This may not be entirely fair to these leading economists, but it did show that Mao was keenly aware of the importance of man in society. But unfortunately this idea was never systematically developed.

Paying lip-service to man being the 'first factor', Lin Biao and the Gang of Four did all they could to push their scheme of the alienation and dehumanization of what they exalted as the 'socialist man'. On the one hand they put Mao on a pedestal and revered him as a god. On the other, they did their worst to turn young people into robots who were made to repeat 'quotations' and to pledge to carry out all the 'directives from the highest', whether they understood them or not!

The recent debate over the meaning of life touched off by a letter written by Pan Xiao shows what serious trauma has been inflicted upon the younger generation of the country by such alienation. But there are also signs that free discussion and debate on this subject will help most of the young people thus afflicted to sort things out for themselves and regain their bearings in society.

The Personality Cult

In answering questions posed by Dara Janekovic of the Yugoslav newspaper *Vjesnik*, Hua Guofeng said of the late Mao Zedong:

Comrade Mao Zedong was indeed a most outstanding figure in Chinese history, whose contributions to revolutionary

theory and practice surpassed those of any other Chinese leader.

Hua then continued:

But he (Mao) was a human being and not a god and therefore fallible.

This is of course not merely Hua's personal opinion. It also represents the view prevalent among the present party leadership, which has been discussing the question of Mao's contributions to the Chinese revolution and his shortcomings. Something similar to this had been said by other leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, but coming from the chairman of the party, and reported in detail by the Xinhua News Agency, the view expressed is of even greater significance. Furthermore, Hua went into Mao's contributions and shortcomings in greater detail than any of the other leaders who spoke about Mao before him.

Whatever mistakes Mao may have made in the period between 1935 and 1957, they are nothing when compared to the victories the party won during this period when Mao was at its head. They were:

- The victories won in the war against Japanese aggression and the War of Liberation.
- The party seized nation-wide political power.
- The socialist transformation of the ownership of the means of production was completed while the nation was building socialism on a large scale.

Here one notices that the flop of the hundred flowers movement and the ensuing anti-Rightist movement are not mentioned. Could this issue have been deliberately by-passed by the party leaders of today, or on it they have yet to make up their minds? Some people think that along with mischievous criticisms, the anti-Rightist movement unfortunately also silenced genuine criticisms which should have been important if the country and the party were to press forward.

Coming to the period between the Great Leap Forward in 1958 and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, Hua Guofeng said that during that period the party 'committed some rather big mistakes in its work'. Specifying these mistakes, Hua said, 'We were over-ambitious in our economic work, and in some cases we erroneously

exaggerated the gravity of class struggle.' He was obviously referring to the Great Leap Forward and its related excesses and the struggle against Peng Dehuai and those who were accused as Right opportunists. But in spite of such mistakes, Hua still concluded that at that time 'the party line, taken as a whole, was correct.'

During the decade of the Cultural Revolution, however, 'the party made grievous, serious mistakes,' Hua categorically affirmed. And then he added, 'As Chairman of the party, Comrade Mao Zedong of course bore responsibility for these mistakes.'

Clearly these mistakes have now been imputed, at least partly, to the personality cult, which, fanned by Lin Biao, came to its apex at that time. Whenever Mao's name was mentioned, what were called the 'four greats' were chanted. Though Mao openly frowned at and dismissed such epithets as 'nuisances', somehow they were never stopped. The practice persisted not only until the death of Mao and the downfall of the Gang of Four who took over from Lin Biao, but lingered on for quite a while after that. This reminded people of feudal times when emperors were dubbed 'the great', 'the wise', 'the clairvoyant', etc., etc. It was distressing that precisely at a time when feudal remnants were supposedly being battered down, some of the worst of feudal values and practices were allowed to run riot. It was only during the exposure of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four that people were awakened to the disaster precipitated by the 'modern superstitions' spread by Lin and the Gang of Four. Statues of Mao have long disappeared from public places, and now most of his portraits, quotations and calligraphy have also come down. A directive was recently issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to severely restrict the image building for political leaders, past and present. The personality cult is to go.

Let us hope that the period of man has been ushered in and is here to stay. Among men and women there are bound to be those who are taller or even giants; but they are still men and women, not gods or goddesses. Modernization and progress in a socialist society can be achieved only when its members can unite with one another as equals and fight for their common goal. Mao's greatness will be remembered. But he will be remembered as a man, not as an infallible god.

Lee Tsung-ying