

PROMOTING DEMOCRACY IN CHINA

by Steven W. Mosher

By now, all of you must be getting pretty tired of hearing conservatives declare that Marx is dead. From Margaret Thatcher to Jeane Kirkpatrick, from Arnold Beichman to Heritage's Bradley Resident Scholar from Poland, Rafal Krawczyk, conservative statesmen and scholars have been busy writing communism's obituary. My own views are closer to those of Brian Crozier, who rarely passes up an opportunity to point out that communist parties are not in the habit of giving up political power and that economic restructuring, if carried far enough, would require them to do exactly that.

At the same time anyone who has done research in a communist country, as I did in China, cannot fail to be aware that communism, as an ideology, is no longer an intellectually credible philosophy. In China, intellectuals talk openly of consigning it to history's rubbish heap.

Obsolete Answers. China's leading dissident, an astrophysicist turned political activist named Fang Lizhi, told Italian journalist Tiziano Terzani in April 1987 of his disillusionment with Marxism. "It is a truth that cannot be denied that Marxism is no longer of much use," Fang was quoted as saying. "As a scientist I can prove it. Most answers given by Marxism with regard to the natural sciences are obsolete, some are even downright wrong. That is a fact. . . . Marxism is a thing of the past. It helps us to understand the problems of the last century, but not those of today." (See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 22, 1987, pp. 52-55.)

Fang, who not without reason is known as China's Sakharov, stated later in the same interview his own personal mission as follows: "Democratization. Without democracy there can be no development. Unless individual human rights are recognized there can be no true democracy. In China the very ABCs of democracy are unknown. We have to educate ourselves for democracy. We have to understand that democracy isn't something that our leaders can hand down to us. A democracy that comes from above is no democracy, it is nothing but a relaxation of control. There will be a heavy fight. But it cannot be avoided."

Encouraging Possible Outcomes. Even Chinese Communist Party officials, though paying lip service to the economic ideas of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, are looking to Western economic models, and even to the Republic of China on Taiwan, for their country's economic development. Neither the free market nor democracy are inevitable outcomes of the current, extremely fluid situation, but they are certainly possible outcomes. I argue that the United States should adopt a proactive policy of promoting democracy in China, bearing in mind Fang's complaint: "In China the very ABCs of democracy are unknown."

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I do not advocate a policy of encouraging democracy in China solely out of a commitment to the fundamental principle of human democracy, the natural right of human beings to govern themselves. Nor am I primarily motivated by an altruistic desire to help the Chinese people, though they certainly would benefit from political pluralization. Rather, I believe the freedom of the United States is best secured by forging a peaceful international environment of flourishing democratic states, including the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Democracy in the PRC is a key to long-term peace in the Asian-Pacific region. Until the Chinese people win the right to free association, and China's numerous ethnic and sub-ethnic groups become full participants in a truly open political process, the upper echelons of the Chinese Communist Party will persevere in political excess at home and (after the current preoccupation with development is sated) may revert to adventurism abroad.

Assessing the Dangers. There is no doubt that the prospect of political pluralization is a worrisome one for Peking. Nearly all of China's sensitive border regions are occupied by minority groups — the Mongols in the north, the Muslims in the northwest, the Chwang in the south, and the Tibetans in the southwest. That Tibet is still run by the army 28 years after its conquest by Peking is a testament not to Peking's shortsightedness but to its prudent assessment of the dangers presented by the pluralization of the Chinese empire along ethnic and religious lines. Even in the Chinese heartland, the Han Chinese majority is riven by dialectal and cultural differences, most often falling along provincial lines. The recurring friction between "mainlanders" and "native Taiwanese" in the Republic of China would be repeated a dozen times over in a democratizing China.

What U.S. policy would help to create alternate centers of power on the Chinese mainland that would compete with, and thus serve to limit, the Chinese Communist Party's monopoly on power? I see at least three things that the U.S. can do to encourage democracy in the PRC: 1) strengthen its program of radio broadcasting; 2) adopt a more active human rights stance; 3) "privatize" the cultural and scholarly exchange programs.

RADIO BROADCASTS

The Voice of America (VOA) currently broadcasts to the Chinese mainland for nine hours each day from relay transmitters in the Philippines and Thailand. Its reports provide the only reliable source of information the Chinese have about events in the rest of the world and, most important, in China itself. While the huge internal propagandist machine run by the state rightly enjoys little credibility, the VOA broadcasts receive high marks. "We can trust the VOA," one student protester in the recent demonstrations for democracy was quoted as saying. Apparently quite a few of his compatriots agree, for an estimated 60 million listen to the network's Chinese-language broadcasts. This constitutes one of the largest radio audiences in the world.

The enormous impact of VOA broadcasts received a backhanded testimonial in January 1987, when the *People's Daily* attacked "a certain foreign radio station" for disseminating

news about the student demonstration. The official New China News Agency (NCNA) went further, attacking the Voice of America by name for alleged “inaccurate” reports on the democracy movement in Shanghai and Peking, which it claimed thwarted government efforts to end the demonstrations.

VOA broadcasts were certainly a primary means by which news of the demonstrations spread throughout the country. To cite but one example, two hundred Peking University undergraduates, who arrived in Shanghai to join the marches, told foreign reporters that they had heard of the unrest on the Voice of America. VOA reports rendered the government’s initial news blackout ineffective and forced the official media to cover the protests. It was this breach of the party’s monopoly on information, more than the reporting itself, that angered Peking officialdom.

VOA Self-Censorship. How did the VOA react to its own importance? In the words of Richard Carlson, the director of the VOA, “We have refrained from analysis, from background stories, from editorials – all of which might lend itself to the story generally – but just to be sensitive to the reporting so we would not in fact play some part in the story.” In short, rather than treat the events in China as it would any news story, the VOA bureaucracy engaged in self-censorship to appease the PRC.

This is conceding too much to the Peking regime. The VOA must apply the same standards in reporting events in China that it does to events in the Philippines and South Africa. While it must be careful to avoid inaccuracies or emotional incitement, lest these be used by the Chinese government to discredit the broadcasts, it must never avoid the truth. Beyond this, its programming should be expanded and include a regular program on what Fang Lizhi called “the ABCs of democracy,” addressing such questions as the rule of law, separation of powers, proportional representation. The Chinese students who openly spoke of their respect for American democratic ideals during the demonstrations, but when asked specifics proved to know little, should have an opportunity to educate themselves.

Finally, VOA programming, currently limited to the Han Chinese in scope and language, should be expanded to include programming in the languages of the major Chinese minorities, the Mongols in the north, the Muslims in the west, and the Tibetans in the southwest. These groups need information on world affairs in addition to that given them by the party’s highly censored media; they especially need to know about the activities of their compatriots outside China. Reports on the Dalai Lama broadcast to Tibet and on Afghanistan to Muslim areas would go far toward helping these minorities understand the larger context of their relationship with Peking.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, Peking has been largely exempt from U.S. pressure to conform to international human rights accords. This was especially true under the Carter Administration, as former Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Roberta Cohen points out in her recent book, *China: The Human Rights Exception?* But it remains a problem today. This reluctance to apply internationally accepted standards consistently to the PRC must end.

The program of economic reform — family farms, rural markets, privately owned shops and businesses — has increased freedom of choice in the economic sphere. But these promising developments should not be allowed to obscure the Chinese Communist Party's unwavering commitment to its own political and cultural ascendancy. The PRC remains a one-party, Leninist state determined to maintain tight control over its populace's thinking and behavior.

In Deng's China, as in Mao's, the mass mobilization campaign remains an important means by which this control is imposed on a recalcitrant population. The rights of individuals, accorded little enough respect in normal times, are ignored altogether during these single-minded efforts at directed social change.

Raising the Specter of Genocide. Three major campaigns have taken place since 1982. The 1983-1986 Anti-Crime Campaign saw hundreds of thousands of alleged criminals arrested, tried, and sentenced. The on-again, off-again Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, aimed at eliminating the political and cultural ideas that accompanied Western science and technology through the "open door," in fact has led to reduced artistic and personal freedoms. The Population Control Campaign led to millions — perhaps tens of millions — of forced abortions and sterilizations.

Recent reports that the Population Control Campaign has intensified in Tibet are particularly disturbing, coming as they do on the heels of the demonstrations for Tibetan independence early this year. The reports include eyewitness accounts that mobile birth control teams have been visiting remote encampments and sterilizing all women of child-bearing age, married or unmarried. If confirmed, such across-the-board sterilizations raise the specter of genocide.

To date, attention to PRC violations of human rights has come mostly from nongovernmental agencies. Amnesty International made the Anti-Crime Campaign in the PRC, with its thousands of executions by quota, the subject of a lengthy report. The foreign press gave the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign fairly wide coverage because of its anti-Western bias and its points in common with the PRC's Cultural Revolution. The few instances of U.S. government action have involved the U.S. Congress. Reports of forced abortions and sterilizations in China's population program, for example, led Congress to cut off U.S. funds to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities because of its support for the program. The executive branch of the U.S. government, however, has maintained a discreet silence on this and other issues.

Marshalling International Criticism. Washington must treat human rights abuses in China with as much concern as it does abuses elsewhere. Moral consistency calls for the same standards to be applied to the PRC that are applied to the Soviet Union, South Africa, and Chile. China must cease being the human rights exception. The recent Senate resolution condemning Chinese repression in Tibet, which passed by a 98 to 0 vote, is an example of the needed activist human rights policy.

This effort would not be quixotic. Traditional Chinese concern with reputation (or saving "face") makes the PRC far more anxious about its international image than the Soviet

Union. Chinese authorities may be impervious to public opinion at home, but they are extraordinarily sensitive to international criticism. When reports began to appear in the world press about widespread female infanticide in rural China, for example, the authorities in the end relaxed the one-child restriction there, thus eliminating one of the causes of that barbaric practice.

The U.S. should exploit this sensitivity. Washington should engage the Chinese in confidential exchanges on issues of human rights. In the heat of oppressive campaigns, when the most serious violations occur, it should air its concerns publicly. These actions would not halt the campaigns, but they might, as in the case of female infanticide, curb the worst abuses. Scientific associations and universities should raise issues related to their activities, such as the right of Chinese scholars to travel abroad, to communicate, and to emigrate.

In extreme cases, economic and military assistance also can be used as levers to improve human rights. Congress was right to withhold funds earmarked for the U.N. Fund for Population Activities until it discontinues support for China's coercive birth control program. Sales of military equipment and technology should be made contingent upon continued progress in human rights.

SCHOLARLY EXCHANGES

Pluralization would also be aided by expanding scholarly and cultural exchanges, but with two important conditions. First, the U.S. should be aware that some of the Chinese who participate in the exchanges are intelligence agents, or if not agents, at least conduits of information to intelligence agencies. Second, the formal, government-to-government U.S.-PRC scholarly exchange program should be scuttled. Instead, private institutions, professional organizations, and individuals should have this field to themselves.

Most international communications, visits, and conferences between American and foreign scholars are arranged privately, without the interference of governments (though public money is often used to support such activities). In the case of China, however, an exception was made by the formation of a national-level U.S. committee to manage government-to-government exchanges at the time the first exchange program was set up in 1978. Created in response to Chinese demands, the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC) is jointly sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Social Science Research Council. The CSCPRC mimics Chinese bureaucratic structure, but with one crucial difference: the Chinese bureaucracies that control their side of the exchange program — the State Education Commission, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences — are all arms of the Peking regime, while the CSCPRC and its component parts are not. This inherent inequity has operated to Peking's great advantage. Peking has been able to limit American researchers to short stints on nonsensitive topics without fear that the U.S. could or would reciprocate with similar limits on Chinese scholars.

Were the United States to cancel the government-to-government exchange program, it would be of direct benefit to the large and growing numbers of private exchange programs run by voluntary organizations, scholarly and professional societies, and institutions of higher education. American colleges and universities alone have over 100 formal exchange agreements with Chinese institutions, a proliferation reflecting the decentralized nature of American higher education and university administration, the entrepreneurial character of American academics, and the divergent motives within those institutions. Most such agreements have worked very well and have clear advantages over national-level programs: they give Americans entry into many different areas and types of institutions in China; they are flexible in a way that national programs are not, and they can meet the needs of diverse constituencies; their reciprocal nature creates incentives for the Chinese to respond to American needs and desires. With the CSCPRC no longer having first call on human and financial resources, these programs would be further invigorated.

Complete reliance on nongovernmental exchanges would influence mainland China in the direction of pluralism. Direct overseas ties partially free Chinese institutions from central government controls. In the past, Chinese universities and research institutes have tried to circumvent the Peking bureaucracy, gain visibility, and overcome restrictions on hard currency. The complete abolition of government-to-government exchanges would force Peking to grant freer rein to universities, professional associations, research institutes, and individuals, thus promoting a nascent pluralism in the academy.

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

I believe that the PRC is now at a unique historical juncture. It took the loss of the mainland to shock the Nationalists into accepting the necessity, long encouraged by the United States, of land reform. The PRC suffered an equally devastating defeat, albeit of a political and economic nature, under the misrule of Mao Zedong and his immediate successor. As a result, the Chinese people lack confidence in the policies of the Communist Party, which is itself gingerly feeling its way toward economic reform. The students, the intelligentsia and, to some extent, party apparatchiks already see the West as a source of solutions to their many, pressing economic problems. With its prestige at an all-time high, there is no reason why the U.S. should not be aggressive in providing solutions to China's political and social problems as well.

The principle of mutual noninterference in domestic affairs is a good rule of thumb for democratic governments in their dealings with one another. It fails utterly as a measuring rod for relations with a state in which political power is the sole preserve of a Marxist-Leninist party. Why should a relatively small organization, conspiratorial in nature, have the right to impose its will on the population it controls without international reproach or resistance? Certainly the U.S. does not allow the South African government that prerogative.

Toward a Fifth Modernization. While freely admitting that my intent is to advance the interests of competing centers of power at the expense of China's all-powerful Communist Party, I am not proposing that the U.S. foment a democratic revolution in China. But I do argue that the U.S. should take full advantage of the window of opportunity provided by

China's open-door policy to educate, through the VOA and expanded scholarly exchanges, the Chinese intelligentsia and its next generation of students.

More VOA broadcasts, attention to human rights, and privatizing the exchange program would help to promote competing centers of political and cultural influence on the Chinese mainland. In this way the United States would give support and encouragement to those in the People's Republic of China who, like Fang Lizhi, are calling for a Fifth Modernization: a move away from feudal totalitarianism toward modern democracy.

