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STRUMILIN AGAIN ON COMMUNES

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Introduction

The prolific Soviet elder economist, Academician S.G. Strumilin, has recently published another of his occasional pronouncements on the communes,<sup>1</sup> one of the most delicate subjects in the whole complex of unsolved questions in the Sino-Soviet relationship. On this occasion he is writing for a communist publication issued in Great Britain, and consequently he is neither so definitive nor so implicitly critical of the Chinese position as last year when his views were aired in Novy Mir (No. 7, 1960, see Background Information, 11 August 1960).

On this occasion he examines the early communes, both of the Christians and the socialist Utopians, and finds that they failed not psychologically but because of economic reasons. In his view they were drowned "in the ocean of private property", which clearly formed a much stronger magnet for their members than collectivism. Although Strumilin does not say so, a contemporary example of the accuracy of his theory can be seen in Israel, where the Kibbutzim are enduring a continuing process of loss of their younger members due to the greater attractions of a booming mixed economy (Times, London, 15 October 1960).

His argument now is that only where private property has been eliminated by "socialism" can the communes become viable. But he omits the significant reservations of his Novy Mir article, a much more complete and persuasive document, which reminded his readers as well as Mao Tse-tung, that the economic

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<sup>1</sup>See Appendix below, Soviet Weekly, April 13, 1961.

prerequisites would not mature on the nation-wide scale, even in the USSR, until 1980. Perhaps the new article was in part intended to jog the elbow of the Soviet authorities, because by now almost a year has elapsed since Strumilin suggested the immediate establishment of experimental communes "somewhere on the Angara or Yenisei Rivers"<sup>2</sup> and in the interim the Kremlin has taken precisely no action. If that was his intention, it may be still more significant that the article has been allowed to appear for external consumption only.

The feelings of Soviet officialdom on the subject were reiterated in a broadcast two months ago in Mandarin to China (March 30, 1961) which discreetly avoids all mention of communes by name, but harps on the theme that for building socialism in rural communities:

"small, individual and low-productivity economies must be transformed into large, collective and high productivity economies based on technical equipment. The experience of all socialist countries has proved that agricultural production cannot be enriched and socialism cannot be built in rural communities without such a transformation."

Soviet critics of the Chinese claim that the communes are "socialist collective ownership developed to a still higher stage" (Red Flag, No.6, 1961) can now point to the effects of two years of agricultural failure in China, with a third just off to a most inauspicious start, and the heavy cost of grain imports from Canada and Australia which may well have exhausted the country's likely reserves of foreign currency (UPI, Washington, 23 May 1961.)

In this connection it is unlikely to be wholly a coincidence that in the last three months alone the USSR is believed to have sold about as much gold in the West as it did in the whole of 1960.<sup>3</sup> The explanation, according to the London Times,<sup>4</sup> is that the Soviet balance of payments deficit has worsened, but there is no evidence that the Kremlin's own foreign trade position has deteriorated to that extent. The New York Times suggests that the USSR is selling Chinese gold on behalf of China, which seems slightly more probable, though it fails to explain why China should not sell the gold herself (she is reported to have sold \$25,000,000 worth of silver since November) and save the brokerage charges. The obvious possibility that the Kremlin is selling some of its gold in order to be able to assist Peking clearly should not be overlooked. But whatever the truth behind the financial manipulations may be, it seems clear that the communes,<sup>5</sup> at least under Chinese management, are proving more expensive than either Mao or Strumilin would care to admit.

r.r.g.

<sup>2</sup>In deepest Siberia.

<sup>3</sup>N.Y. Times, 27 May 1961.

<sup>4</sup>May 29, 1961.

<sup>5</sup>Which were formed partly for economic reasons, see page 9 Appendix 2 below.

## COMMUNES IN PERSPECTIVE

Soviet Weekly

April 13, 1961

by Academician S. Strumilin

Communes in which people have lived together are not a brand new idea. They existed even in the most remotest times. The New Testament, for instance, provides evidence that the earliest Christians tried to form communities in which... "all that believed were together, and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

Other attempts to live in communes were made much later both by members of religious sects and by atheistic socialist Utopians - but these attempts inevitably ended in failure. Nothing whatsoever has remained of all those experiments but unhappy memories.

### Instability

Such experiments were made by those who followed Leo Tolstoy's teachings. Tolstoy himself described their outcome as follows :

"As often as men set up communes, nothing came of them. All energy at first went into the external arrangement of life; and when that had been done, quarrels began, and slander, until all fell apart..."

Though not at all inclined to contradict the observations of the great moralist Leo Tolstoy, we cannot attribute instability, of communal life in the past merely to such qualities of the individual members of communes as bad temper and a penchant for gossip.

That would seem all the more incredible when one remembers the meek Tolstoyan vegetarians with their non-resistance to evil, or the legendary early Christians, haloed in sanctity.

The causes for the dissolution of all these fraternal communities must therefore be sought somewhat deeper - not in psychology but in economics.

### Contradictions

First and foremost was the profound contradictions between private property which dominated all pre-socialist societies and the complete repudiation of private property in those sparse social cells in which the first ideas of communism emerged.

Private property and private interests versus common property and common interests - that was the apple of discord within the individual cells, leading ultimately to their disintegration.

Each and every cell, a lone island of peace and friendship, was surrounded by an ocean of alien property and all



the temptations of rebellious passions and malicious intrigues - apart from furious market competition and speculation in money and goods for personal gain and the acquisition of the property of others.

It was not surprising therefore, that all these lures and lusts sank all foreign ideas and social micro-formations in the ocean of private property.

### Cravings

These cravings undoubtedly provoked greed, envy, gossip, intrigue and slander in an unstable community, reared to venerate private property as "sacred".

Even worse things happened. Remember the New Testament's story of the very first Christian community, that of the Apostles, whose treasurer betrayed his community for thirty pieces of silver!

In addition to the lure of money, moreover, many other selfish motives divided people.

The illustrious Utopian socialist, Charles Fourier, was ready to harness all the passions to "social harmony" - even "the passion for intrigue" which he held to be "predominating and guiding".

It is only socialism that, having eliminated private property throughout society, has first paved the way for individual communes and communist work teams, shops and factories - as well as for their unification in lasting unions in a general system of "self-governing communist associations of the working people."

### Exclusion

Socialism, however, eliminates only private ownership of the means of production. It preserves, for the time being, the group "ownership" of the collective farms, and personal ownership of the means of subsistence of individual citizens.

Public ownership of the means of production excludes the possibility of private enterprise and class exploitation in production.

This is a great social achievement in itself, though, as experience has shown, it can neither preclude undercover mercenary speculation in goods in short supply, nor the theft of public property, nor encroachments upon the property of others.

At first glance it might seem that such anti-social actions, provoked by the egoism planted in man even milleniums ago, precludes all practical social transformations, and will foil the complete protection of society. Actually, however, this is far from being true.

Significant

In capitalist countries where inequality in property reaches its most extreme proportions, so-called "crimes against property" find fertile soil.

The number of crimes has been growing from year to year in the USA, where more than 2,000,000 cases were recorded in 1956 alone. And more than 95% of those crimes consisted of thefts and other "crimes against property."

Even more significant is the fact that the number of crimes against property declined in the years of favorable market conditions, and increased in the years of depression and crisis.

It is noteworthy, too, that even in the USA where the propertyless classes of the working people are in the great majority, professional thieves and robbers, according to criminal statistics, make up fewer than 1.5 per cent of the population.

If predatory inclinations stem from the egoistic nature of man alone, we cannot fail to see that the number of honest workers even in the kingdom of profits is sixty times greater than that of criminals. Altruism, therefore, predominates over egoism in the nature of man.

It would be far more correct, however, to conclude that the source of all conflicts, including criminal conflicts at the juncture of wealth and poverty in capitalist society is due not to original sin but to such failings of modern society as extreme inequality of property, poverty, chronic production crises, permanent unemployment, and in general, to all the social props of private ownership ended for ever by communism.



The Listener  
March 9, 1961  
by John Gray

Most of China's liberal intellectuals stayed in China when the Communists came to power. Some did so because they could not leave, but a large number, among them many of the most prominent, stayed by choice. Almost all China's scientists remained, and almost all her imaginative writers; but even among those whose interests touched politics, such as sociologists, economists, historians, and political scientists, at least a substantial majority accepted the Communist victory and prepared - with what fears and reservations we can only guess - to support the new regime.

This willingness of so many of China's best minds to accept Communist rule, and their attitudes since 1949, can only be understood against the background of the experience of the Chinese intellectuals in the thirty years before 1949. The Confucian empire was totalitarian both in the sense that there was no aspect of life, moral, intellectual, or economic, immune from state interference, and in the sense that no group had rights against the State. The state ruled through a bureaucracy whose training was essentially an ideological training and whose power was partly maintained by deliberate rejection of the idea of the rule of law. The analogies with Communism are obvious, and may have contributed to the fact that Chinese intellectual life since the nineteen-twenties has been strongly influenced by Marxist ideas. Although only a mere handful of intellectuals were Communists, some form of economic determinism played a considerable part in the thinking of most of the others, and had more or less seriously modified the Western liberalism which provided the mainstream of modern Chinese intellectual life.

More important than tradition, however, is the fact that the most obvious features of Chinese society seemed more easily explicable in Marxist than in any other terms. The biggest obstacle to the transformation of Chinese agriculture and rural life was a class of wholly parasitic landlords. The most convenient explanation of industrial backwardness could be found in the privileges enjoyed in China by foreign business interests under the terms of the so-called Unequal Treaties. These two ideas provided the unquestioned premisses of Chinese political argument and were as influential on the right as on the left.

Ch'en T-hsiu, a liberal professor in Peking University who became the first chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, and who was a principal figure in the controversy of the early nineteen twenties on the relative merits of Marxism and pragmatism, was, ironically, made a Communist by a phrase of John Dewey: 'Facts have the power to make laws; laws do not have the power to make facts'. Chinese intellectuals were to find more and more practical proof of this idea as the reforms of the nationalists were forcibly destroyed by local conservatives who held the law in contempt. What China needed was not parliamentary institutions but a government which could irresistibly enforce its will.

In fact the state of the Nationalist Party and Government from the middle of the second world war onwards convinced China's liberals that they could expect from General Chiang Kai-shek neither democracy nor a reforming dictatorship. The nationalists increasingly came to represent the most medieval elements in Chinese society and they sought to check the decline in their authority by action against the liberal intellectuals which was more repressive if not as efficient as anything the Communists have done since 1949. That repression culminated in the murder of the liberal writers Li Kung-po and Wen I-to in 1946, and continued in indiscriminate purges in the universities.

Inflation and corruption finished what repression had begun, with the result that the Communists came to power with the acquiescence of the Chinese middle classes. To the intellectuals they not only offered better conditions of life and work but also seemed to provide a chance to share in the reconstruction of China which the Kuomintang had failed to provide. And so many men of liberal sympathies, including some outspokenly hostile to Marxist ideas, remained in China by a conscious choice based on their own political principles; and they have since sought to maintain those principles within the framework of the Communist revolution.

For their part the Communists welcomed the support of the intellectuals and of the liberal and social democratic parties which some of them led. They did so for a combination of reasons. The intellectuals and their political parties were accepted as an important part of the united front and of the coalition government which expressed it. Indeed, even if there had been no coalition the Communists were well aware that they would still have had to seek the support of the intellectuals because of the immense prestige traditionally enjoyed by the educated classes in China. In any case, they were indispensable to the new regime as individual experts. Finally, the close contacts between some of the minor parties and the Chinese business classes gave these parties and their leaders an additional usefulness as a means of liaison between the Communist Party and commerce and industry.

The attitudes of both sides in this alliance were ambiguous. The intellectuals were willing to accept land reform, and cooperation in Chinese agriculture and a crash programme of industrialization led by the state because these policies were common, at least in theory, to all Chinese political parties - including even the right-wing Kuomintang. They were less willing, however, to accept the permanent possession of political power by a single party and the loss of freedom which this would entail. They hoped to be allowed to act as a sort of loyal opposition and so to mitigate the worse rigours of a totalitarian system - in the hope, perhaps, of eventually persuading the Communist Party that the sharing of power with other groups, and at least limited freedom of opposition, would be to their own advantage. On their side the attitude of the Communists has been more ambiguous in practice than in theory. They have varied between acceptance of the intellectuals as a loyal opposition and a conviction that they were so politically tainted that they could not be trusted even with the most technical and non-political responsibilities.



### Representation for Minority Groups

Immediately after the Communist take-over, coalition government with all its implications of intellectual support for, and participation in, the revolution appeared to be a reality. Several members of the minority parties were given cabinet posts, and these and other groups, such as writers and university teachers, were given representation in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a provisional national parliament which was to be replaced in 1954 by the formally elected National People's Congress. The editorship of the liberal newspapers was not changed. Prominent non-Marxists were given the highest posts in some of the universities. Among those known in the West, the economist Ma Yin-Ch'u became President of Peking University. Fei Hsiao-T'ung, the London-trained anthropologist, was made head of the new Minority Nationalities University. The liberal political scientist Ch'ien Tuan-sheng was made head of the new College of Political Science and Law. In return, the intellectuals pledged loyalty to the new leaders of China and, in varying degrees, to Marxism, and flocked to special study groups to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the ideology and policies of the new government. In this honeymoon period it is unlikely that public statements by intellectuals were made under pressure.

A change came in 1951. The Korean war provided both incentive and opportunity for the Communists to begin the destruction of all groups which might provide the focus and leadership for opposition. In the three-anti and five-anti campaigns, China's business classes were crushed, and in the same period the campaign against counter-revolutionaries, the most violent and ruthless campaign since the early thirties, eliminated the possibility of successful resistance to the redistribution of the land. These movements were accompanied by a campaign for 'ideological remoulding,' in which intellectuals and other confessed to errors of thought arising from their social origins (which were usually upper-class) or from experience abroad. In the universities, for example, the sins for which confession was expected included: snobbishness towards workers and peasants, ignoring politics on the plea of being a specialist, teaching irrelevant to China's practical needs, careerism, resistance to Communist reform of the universities, failure to persuade students to undertake political study, the formation of scholarly cliques, and pro-Americanism (many of China's main intellectuals had been trained in the United States or in American universities in China.)

### Ideological Remoulding

The aim of this campaign was not merely to use the intellectuals and their confessions as a means of propaganda, nor even only to force them to public acceptance of their ideological inferiority. There is no doubt that the Communist Party hoped and expected the confessions to be sincere, to represent a real change of view, a sort of religious conversion, secured in theory by persuasion but in fact often by inducing a mixture of fear, guilt, and a sense of isolation. The 'ideological remoulding' campaign, distressing as it is to Western observers, must be



seen in its context. The Communist Party regarded the intellectuals, temporarily at least, as fellow revolutionaries, and in attempting by persuasion to win them to enthusiastic and unreserved support in the revolution they did them the honor of classifying them with the laboring masses. At this time the collectivization of Chinese agriculture was secured with a minimum need for force by the patient persuasion of individuals, until the enthusiastic support of the majority was secured. The success of this technique with the peasants depended on shielding them from hearing about alternative policies; but the intellectuals already knew the alternatives, and so the technique largely failed with them.

Yet the same pressures continued to be used until 1955. At the very end of that year the Party's policy began to change. As industrialization went on rapidly and as the state assumed responsibility for the whole economy of China, the lack of educated men became an ever more pressing problem. The Party's manifest failure to give the intellectuals any real opportunity to participate began to have serious practical consequences. In February 1956, therefore, Mr. Chou En-lai initiated a new policy at a meeting of the Chinese Peoples Political Consultative Conference. He called for more support and better conditions for the intellectuals, and less suspicion of them. In the following May, Mr. Mao made his 'Hundred Flowers' speech in which he declared that ideological differences could not be expected to disappear quickly, that they might even be expected to recur in the new student generation, and that they could be resolved only by free discussion. The Communists admitted that rigid doctrine was leading to intellectual sterility, and that academic life was stagnating for lack of free discussion and independent thinking. The success of socialization in the preceding six years made a measure of relaxation politically possible. To some extent the new policy may have reflected changes in Russia after Mr. Khrushchev's attack on Stalin at the twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

#### Short-lived Freedom to Criticize

The theory itself was put forward in a speech on the events in Eastern Europe to the Supreme State Conference in February 1957 but not made public until May. Its publication was accompanied by an invitation to the citizens of China to criticize the Communist Party's conduct of the revolution. With the events in Poland and Hungary now known in China, this second invitation to free discussion, unlike the first, was given an overwhelming response. The opportunity to criticize lasted for exactly one month. By then it was clear to the Communist Party that some of China's most prominent intellectuals, with considerable support, at least among students, refused to accept the premiss on which discussion was to have been based, namely that the new Chinese political system was a good system but liable to certain faults. Instead the leading critics condemned the system itself and declared that the root of current evils was the Communist Party's monopoly of political power. They were promptly accused of rightism and their supporters in the Party itself of revisionism, and were sent to the country to labor among the peasants and to see the revolution at first hand.

It is widely believed in the West that the whole 'Hundred

Flowers' movement was simply a stratagem for flushing out heretics and some Communists certainly used this unattractive rationalization after the event. Yet in my view this explanation is untenable. For one thing, the movement grew out of an admitted practical need for more freedom of expression. For another thing, it is impossible to suppose that the theory of contradictions among the people - probably the most significant addition to Marxist doctrine since the death of Lenin - was produced merely to justify a very brief and very mild purge. The alternative explanation, that Mr. Mao Tse-tung's request for criticism was sincere, is much more plausible. It would be consistent with the whole of his political philosophy, which has always clearly reflected his belief that bureaucracy and not reaction is the enemy from which Communism has most to fear, at least in China. In this context the 'Hundred Flowers' movement can be regarded as one of a series of attempts to keep open the channels of communication between Party and people which Mr. Mao has been making since 1942. The reaction in which it ended is more than adequately accounted for by the fact that the criticisms were unexpectedly radical, that the critics clearly had Hungary in mind, that they showed that they had forgotten none of their western bourgeois prejudices, and finally, that the revisionism which they represented had become - as a result of events in Eastern Europe - a threat to the unity of the Communist bloc, on the solidarity of which China feels that her safety depends. The only surprising thing about the reaction was its mildness; a year later, most of the principal victims were at liberty and had been restored to some, although not to all, of their positions. Indeed in theory the 'Hundred Flowers' still bloom. The emphasis, however, is no longer on the recognition of 'long-term coexistence' between the Party and non-Communist intellectuals, but on discussion as the best means to secure unanimity under the formula 'unity-criticism-unity'.

From this one may conclude that the Chinese intellectuals have been disappointed in the hope that they would be able to play an independent part in the revolution. They have only occasionally and partially been accepted as a loyal opposition. For the most part they have had to work on sufferance and under suspicion, and have been emphatically made to feel that they are only a necessary and temporary evil in Chinese society. Yet it may also be concluded that in spite of all provocation most of the intellectuals have retained the loyalties which inspired them in 1949 - to the Chinese nation, to moderate socialism, and to government by consent and the rule of law, and at the same time to the Communist Government as China's only hope of progress.

The question which remains is the extent to which they have been able to influence the direction that Chinese development has taken in the last decade. It is a question which has been completely neglected and which could be answered conclusively only after considerable research. However, there are signs that the liberal intellectuals have not been entirely without influence. For example, the acceptance of birth control as at least a second line of defence against over-population represents a compromise between the Party and the Western-trained academic economists. The new formula for literature which replaces socialist realism by 'revolutionary realism combined with revolutionary romanticism' and which condemns 'crude sociology' as a standard of literary judgment, represents a small victory for the writers.



The emphasis on the development of local industry from 1958 onwards may have owed something to the vigorous criticism made of the government's previous policies in this respect by Fei-Hsiao-t'ung.

What is even more important, and as little understood, is the possible relation between the criticism of the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign and the creation of the communes. One followed hard on the other, and one may have been the answer to the other. The motives for the creation of the rural communes were partly technological and economic but in their political aspect, involving for a Communist state a most remarkable and courageous degree of decentralization, they may have been an attempt to get rid of the evils of the bureaucracy which was the main target of criticism - not in the way proposed by the critics, that is the relinquishment by the Communists of their monopoly of power, but by short-circuiting the bureaucracy and putting affairs in the hands of the local communists and their elected leaders, under the supervision of local Communist Party members.

I want to stress that this analysis, and its conclusions, are wholly tentative. Very little thorough research has been attempted on the subject, and one can give only impressions - at least partly subjective - rather than facts. The Chinese revolution is so complex, and in many respects so novel, that we must approach it with an open mind and with a certain humility, and we must not expect to understand this or any other aspect of it unless we are prepared to provide for twenty times the amount of research on it which is at present being carried on in this country. We must at least avoid falling into the assumption that all criticisms of Communist policies made by Chinese liberals are automatically correct. We must remember that it is the Communists and not the liberal intellectuals who have been responsible for the success and the verve of the revolution.