



From the Archives:

Notes from a China Study Tour 1971: Discussions with Revolutionary Workers in Shanghai

In May 1971, Comrade A.E. (Ted) Bull, Vice-Chairperson of the CPA (M-L) and Secretary of the Victorian Branch of the Waterside Workers Federation, led a group of young workers and students on a study tour of the People's Republic of China. Bull was a Vice-President of the Victorian Branch of the Australia-China Society at the time.

The following excerpts from notes taken by one of the tour participants during discussions with Chinese comrades remind us of the commitment of the Chinese Communist Party to the forward march of socialism, and steps taken during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) to make that forward march a mass issue. They are also a measure against which to realise the nature and extent of the capitalist restoration that took place after Mao Zedong's death in 1976.



Comrade Ted Bull with his Chinese interpreter on the study tour to China in 1971

The excerpts, which have been transcribed from a handwritten notebook, and the accompanying photos, have never before been published.

The following discussion with Chinese comrades took place in Shanghai. The speakers on the Chinese side included participants in the GPCR from a number of factories in Shanghai.

The discussion began with an introduction by a Shanghai comrade to the GPCR:

“The GPCR was a vigorous revolution involving the revolutionary masses. A revolution carried out under the dictatorship of the proletariat and led by the Communist Party. As Chairman Mao said, ‘The GPCR is correct and most timely in order to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat and to prevent the restoration of capitalism and to build socialism’.

“At first some comrades did not understand this nature. They thought the aim was merely to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat by crushing the old state organs, that is, in armed revolution. They did not understand that in a revolution under the dictatorship of the



proletariat, the nature of the state is not changed, but that small portion of power in the control of a handful of bad elements is seized back and returned to the proletariat.

“In the USSR where there has been an all-round restoration of capitalism it will be necessary to restore the dictatorship of the proletariat through armed struggle, while in China this is not necessary as only a small handful of bourgeois elements have managed to seize back power.

“Armed struggle against the Chinese state is armed struggle against the proletarian dictatorship led by the Communist Party, and, as such, is counter-revolutionary rebellion against the proletariat.

“In the West, much publicity was given to rumours of armed struggle during the Cultural Revolution. In some districts there were struggles by coercion. These were caused by the class enemies inciting violent struggle through mass organisations, for example, trade unions. They propagated non-proletarian ideas like right and “left” opportunism, sectarianism, detached intellectualism and individualism. However, these were minor currents and not the main current. Chairman Mao pointed out that the GPCR was a struggle by reason, not coercion, and this was always the policy adhered to by the Party. The West seizes upon these isolated incidents of coercion because the Cultural Revolution was an attack on bourgeois politics, ideology and organisation. They know it can only make China stronger as the proletarian dictatorship is consolidated and that China’s prestige will be raised abroad.

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“The Party’s view on these incidents is that they were caused by a few class enemies taking advantage of some non-proletarian views of the masses and that the losses were small while the achievements were very great indeed. Also, the class enemies were very stupid because in the process of inciting the masses they exposed themselves. Chairman Mao points out that coercion creates disorder in the enemy ranks, but tempers the revolutionary ranks. Thus, we cannot comprehend the GPCR if we view it simply as an armed struggle.”

Following this broad introduction, a comrade presented an outline specifically on the stages of development of the GPCR in Shanghai. Then a comrade who was a cadre and production manager in the No. 1 Valve factory at the start of the GPCR, spoke. He outlined how he had taken the revisionist road:

“Before the Cultural Revolution I was extremely influence by Liu Shaoqi’s line and carried it out in factory management. I did not give prominence to proletarian politics and, in fact, was not interested in class politics at all. I interested myself only in production. I thought that, as a Party member, doing my best for socialist construction meant doing best the job given to me by the state, that is, the tasks of production and a vice-director. Thus, I did not realise it was my job to study and participate in class politics. I also spread this view among the workers with very bad results.

“I put profit in command. For example, the state set a production task with some things urgent and some things not so urgent. I concentrated on producing the things which brought the



highest profit but neglected the urgent tasks if they were for low profit and took a longer time to produce. Thus, although the production task was fulfilled, the state's demand for urgent goods was not. This is the same as Soviet policy – production for profit rather than from the state's needs.

"I advocated material incentives (bonuses) for workers with over-fulfilled tasks and for those giving constructive suggestions. The workers were taking part in socialist construction, but I was asking them to produce for their own profit. This created disunity among the workers and lowered the quality of the goods produced.

"I also advocated reliance on the experts and authorities in running the factory which attached great importance to bourgeois and bad elements among the ranks of the workers, and these elements exercised dictatorship of the bourgeoisie over the workers for some time. They were not reconciled to their defeat in the revolution and often stole profits and altered accounts. Some ex-factory owners had photos in their homes of factories formerly owned by them. These photos and the changed accounts were later exhibited in the factories.



Comrade Ted Bull and 'Old Yuan', a personal friend of Mao's, at Ya'nan



“As the Cultural Revolution progressed, the masses rebelled against the capitalist-roaders and I was severely criticized. However, I still did not understand the nature of the Cultural Revolution or my mistakes and felt wronged since I still thought I was helping socialist construction. Then they criticized me for not participating in labour, for not participating in class struggle and for treating the workers as backward and hence stifling their initiative. I then went to the exhibition of photos exposing the capitalists in the factory and decided that I must take part in class struggle, that this was the way for socialist construction. As Chairman Mao said:

In China, although in the main socialist transformation has been completed with respect to the system of ownership, and although the large-scale and turbulent class struggles of the masses characteristic of the previous revolutionary periods have in the main come to an end, there are still remnants of the overthrown landlord and comprador classes, there is still a bourgeoisie, and the remolding of the petty bourgeoisie has only just started. The class struggle is by no means over. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the class struggle between the different political forces, and the class struggle in the ideological field between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will continue to be long and tortuous and at times will even become very acute. The proletariat seeks to transform the world according to its own world outlook, and so does the bourgeoisie. In this respect, the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, is still not really settled.

“If the Cultural Revolution had failed, the state most certainly would have changed its colour. That is why Chairman Mao personally initiated and led the Cultural Revolution – to prevent the restoration of capitalism.”

“After the bourgeois elements and ideas had been exposed, the initiative of the workers began to show. Quality and production began to increase. Gradually, I began to see through Liu Shaoqi’s line that the masses are backward. I was greatly influenced by study of Chairman Mao’s works, especially his instructions on the Cultural Revolution. I had made mistakes because I didn’t have class struggle or the struggle between the two lines in mind.

“As my consciousness rose, the workers helped and re-educated me. I was eventually re-elected as Vice-director and am still a cadre member of the factory Revolutionary Committee. This repudiates the Western rumours that cadres were removed. I still have the same positions as before, but now class struggle comes before production.

“Liu Shaoqi’s line served only to restore capitalism. Following that line, only representatives of the bourgeoisie like myself, could be in power.

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Another speaker was a female cadre. She explained how many cadres made mistakes and took the wrong road:

“I am 45 years old and I entered the factory (where I still work) at the age of 9, that is, as a child labourer.



All smiles for the revolution: students of worker and peasant origin at Beijing University

“After Liberation, I loved the Party and Chairman Mao and became a trade union representative for one workshop. However, all I knew about was how to look after the welfare of the workers and how to manage production well. Through lack of study of Chairman Mao’s works, I didn’t understand the political questions of power and class struggle.

“The Liu Shaoqi-liners took advantage of my love for Chairman Mao, saying that class struggle had died out which prevented my taking an interest in politics.

“So, when the workers rose in rebellion, I could not understand it. I took a wrong stand in trying to protect the factory leadership. A so-called ‘work team of Chairman Mao’ entered the factory in order to spread reactionary anti-class struggle ideas and I was fooled by and worked with them.

“They wanted to leave class struggle to the Public Security Bureau and the PLA and encouraged me and others to simply do a good job in production. I tried to protect the ‘work team’ and helped the ‘Red Corps’.¹⁹

¹⁹ At the time that Chairman Mao launched the GPCR, in mid-1966, Liu Shaoqi was State President and controlled much of the bureaucracy of the state, as well as many officials of the Party. Liu was not in favour of mass movements and sought to protect his policy directions, which differed from Mao’s. To try and head off the spread of struggle against the policies he stood for, Liu dispatched numerous “work teams” made up of Party officials loyal to himself to factories, universities, schools and communes to bring the movement under his control. The Red Guards rejected the authority of the “work teams”, but Liu’s supporters set up their own Red Guard organisations to fight those supporting Mao. The “Red Corps” mentioned by the woman at this meeting was a pro-Liu Red Guard organisation – eds.



“Later, I was criticised by the other workers. I couldn’t understand it and said ‘We represent the Party – who are you rebelling against?’ It was only after the workers patiently studied with me that I saw the true nature of the reactionaries.

“Chairman Mao teaches us Communists:

Communists must always go into the whys and wherefores of anything, use their own heads and carefully think over whether or not it corresponds to reality and is really well founded; on no account should they follow blindly and encourage slavishness.

“He also points out:

After the enemies with guns have been wiped out, there will still be enemies without guns; they are bound to struggle desperately against us, and we must never regard these enemies lightly. If we do not now raise and understand the problem in this way, we shall commit the gravest mistakes.

“After studying Chairman Mao, I criticized myself to the workers and won back their respect.”
