

Chinese regime rediscovers the working class

John Chan**30 December 2008**

For decades, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has presided over the most rapacious forms of capitalism. The overriding concern of CCP officials from top to bottom has been economic growth, the fostering of the market and the accumulation of wealth, including their own personal fortunes. Workers were barely referred to, and then usually in derogatory terms.

Now the CCP has suddenly rediscovered the proletariat. A prominent comment in the official Xinhua news agency on December 15 declared that the "Chinese working class will continue to maintain its position as the leading class". The CCP will "wholeheartedly depend on the working class," it added. This slogan was said to be the main emphasis of CCP leaders at the recent 15th congress of state-run trade unions.

Lu Xueyi from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences told Xinhua: "The working class is still the class basis of the CCP, the CCP is still the vanguard party of the working class and the advanced nature of the CCP is still expressed through the working class." No attempt was made to justify this claim nor, given the mountain of evidence to the contrary, could there be.

Confronted by the greatest global economic crisis since the 1930s, Beijing has openly collaborated with the major imperialist powers as well as bankers and corporate chiefs to save the profit system. If the CCP has decided to pay lip service to "the leading role of the working class", it is because it is terrified of the social upheavals that will be unleashed by rising unemployment and poverty. Such a party has nothing to do with socialism or communism.

The CCP broke from Marxism and the proletariat more than 80 years ago. Following the betrayal of Second Chinese Revolution in 1927 at the hands of Stalin, Mao abandoned the working class and based the party on peasant guerrillaism. Under the Stalinist "two-stage" perspective, Mao sought an alliance with sections of Chinese bourgeoisie in carrying out democratic, national reforms, putting off

socialism to the distant future.

When the CCP's peasant armies entered the cities in 1949, they suppressed any independent action by the working class. Mao's "socialism" in the 1950s and 1960s mixed his own peasant radicalism with the reactionary Stalinist dogma of "socialism in one country"—that is, national economic autarchy. Mao's utopian project produced one economic catastrophe after another, paving the way for openly capitalist elements headed by Deng Xiaoping to come to power in 1978.

In January 1979, Deng worked out a program of establishing export processing zones with five "red capitalists"—the magnates of steel, machinery, textile, cement and pig bristle who had joined Mao's regime in 1949 and formally handed over their properties in return for interest payments and senior posts. Deng's rehabilitation of the former bourgeoisie and the opening up of China to foreign capital led to an explosion of private entrepreneurs.

World imperialism did not forget that historic moment. Commenting on the 30th anniversary of the "market reform", the *Financial Times* wrote on December 18: "Mao Zedong was right all along. Deng Xiaoping was a 'capitalist roader'." China became the sweatshop of the world, especially after the regime crushed the last upheaval of the working class in 1989 with tanks and troops in Tiananmen Square. It was proof to global investors that the CCP would do whatever was necessary to crush unrest among workers.

In 2002, the former Chinese President Jiang Zemin formally allowed private capitalists to join the CCP. His "theory of three represents" declared that the new business elite and emerging middle classes were the most "advanced" representatives of society. Private entrepreneurs were elevated as "part of the working people" and awarded official prizes as "model workers".

Until recently, the "working class" and the "proletariat" scarcely featured in CCP propaganda which was directed at

attacking ideas of social equality and extolling the virtues of getting wealthy. Official ideologues branded workers in state enterprises as irresponsible loafers who should be subjected to the whip of market forces. The result was the lay-off of tens of millions of workers in the 1990s.

The new ideological slant is clearly motivated by fear. As Xinhua explained, the working class in China has exploded from 120 million in 1978 to more than 400 million. Its share of the total workforce increased from 30 percent to 50 percent over the same period. While Xinhua praised the proletariat as the "most farsighted, most selfless and best organised class", its revolutionary character is what most concerns the entrenched bureaucracy.

Xinhua pointed indirectly to widespread hostility to the CCP regime. Referring to the collapse of the Soviet Union, it cited a survey showing that only 4 percent of the Soviet citizens in 1991 regarded the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) as the representatives of the working class. The rest thought the party was a regime of privileged bureaucrats.

If such a survey were done in China today, the results would be similar. The vast majority of CCP members are state bureaucrats, military officers and businessmen. Their privileges of luxury goods, mansions, wining and dining, constitute a substantial drain on public spending and a major burden on working people. The gulf between rich and poor in China is as great as anywhere in the world.

CCP party bosses are widely hated for enforcing sweatshop exploitation, sanctioning or operating deadly mining operations and expelling peasants from their land to make way for real estate speculators. They are notorious for plundering state enterprises, causing them to go bankrupt and workers to lose their jobs. When protests erupt, local officials do not hesitate to use police repression.

A recent investigative report by college students published online revealed the abuses suffered by workers in Coca-Cola's five bottling plants and suppliers. Some worked more than 100 hours overtime per month—much more than the legally allowed 36 hours—for the minimum wage. "These employees are involved in the most dangerous, intense and tiresome labour, work the longest hours, but receive the lowest wage and face arrears with and even cutbacks on their pay," the report said.

Xinhua acknowledged the glaring social inequality in China, writing: "At present, China's Gini Co-efficiency [the

standard measure of social inequality] has exceeded 0.46 percent, as the gap between rich and poor is widening. Among the 100 million people living in poverty nationally, a significant part is the working class masses."

To justify this appalling situation, Xinhua cited the comments of a Peking University professor who declared that private enterprise and capitalist exploitation were "unavoidable" at present stage of China's development, but would be "eventually abolished". According to the latest version of the Stalinist two-stage theory, due to China's relative backwardness, it must pass through a protracted stage of market economy—officially at least 100 years—before socialism can be built. Such feeble rationalisations are wearing thin, however.

While the Chinese economy was expanding rapidly, the CCP was able to balance precariously in power using a mixture of small concessions and police state methods. Now that the economy is slowing dramatically, skyrocketing unemployment is threatened to trigger social unrest. A report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences this month showed that 1.5 million college graduates would not find a job this year. Even if China were able to maintain a growth rate of 8-9 percent, it will face an "oversupply" of 12 million workers a year until 2050. Many analysts predict a growth figure well below 8 percent in 2009.

The real purpose behind the Xinhua comment was revealed in its praise for the expansion of state unions into the private and foreign firms that now employ the bulk of the workforce. It hailed the building of trade unions as "strengthening the class basis of the CCP". In fact, these unions, like their counterparts around the world, do not represent the class interests of the working class, even in a limited way, but rather function as an industrial policeman to supervise the working class, guarantee higher efficiency and productivity, and above all to suppress the struggles of workers.

For all of its tributes to the "leading role of the working class", Xinhua is calling for the strengthening of the police state apparatus in preparation for the turbulent period ahead.



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