

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Flat C.2, 12th Floor,
31 Conduit Road,
Hong Kong.

ARD-13.
Raising the Stakes.

12th July 1966.

Mr. Richard H. Nolte,
Institute of Current World Affairs,
366 Madison Avenue,
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte,

The "great proletarian cultural revolution" now in full swing in China has already attracted a good deal of attention in the outside world. Starting some months ago with the eradication of various "poisonous weeds" in the literary world, it continued with the "trampling underfoot of monsters in the ideological domain" of a number of other walks of the national life, apparently reaching a sensational climax with the dismissal of Peng Chen, Mayor of Peking and long a member of the very highest elite of the Chinese Communist Party. However, to assume, as some foreigners have done, that the movement is solely the product of a struggle for power in the upper ranks of the Party is surely to miss much of its significance. Taking the movement at face value we may understand it as part of a massive effort by an aging leadership to ensure a succession unswayed by the impurities of "modern revisionism".

There is no field in which the campaign against the survival or revival of bourgeois ideas and the menace of revisionism is so important as in education, and here the changes are clearly going to take longer than a few weeks. On the 13th June, the Central Committee of the Party and the State Council issued a joint statement announcing that to ensure the success of the cultural revolution it had been decided to change the existing system of entrance examinations for the institutions of higher education, and to postpone this year's enrolment of new students for universities and colleges (and thus, evidently, the start of the new academic year) for six months. "..... Though it has been constantly improved since liberation, the method of examination and enrolment for the higher educational institutions has failed, in the main, to free itself from the set pattern of the bourgeois system of examination; and such a method is harmful to the implementation of the guiding policy on education formulated by the Central Committee of the

Party and Chairman Mao, and to absorption into the higher educational institutions of a still greater number of revolutionary young people from among the workers, peasants and soldiers. This system of examination must be completely reformed. Therefore, time is needed to study and work out new methods of enrolment."

Five days later an editorial in the People's Daily gave further details of the new policy and the reasoning behind it: "If the entrance examination for enrolling new students went ahead as usual just now, this would undoubtedly bring the great proletarian cultural revolution in the field of education to a stop halfway, cripple the revolutionary enthusiasm of the Left students and encourage the counter-revolutionary arrogance of the bourgeois Right.....Beginning this year, a new method of enrolment, a combination of recommendation and selection, in which proletarian politics are put first and the mass line is followed, will go into effect; the best students will be admitted, selected from among those recommended for their outstanding moral, intellectual and physical qualities."

The casual reader might well think, from the tone of these pronouncements, and the analysis which follows of the faults of the existing educational system, that the universities had scarcely been touched by the new order in China in the last seventeen years. That this is not the case could be shown by a recital of the various purges which have already swept the universities and by a description of the constant pressure applied to intellectuals generally since 1956 at least. Instead, I have chosen to describe briefly a visit made just over a year ago to the University of Nanking in which many of the policies outlined in the recent announcements were already, as I was told, being implemented.

My request to visit the history faculty of the University of Nanking was a second choice; I should have preferred to learn something of the teaching of law in China, but this was apparently still too sensitive an area to permit foreign probing, and the university to which I was invited had no law faculty. I went primarily with the object of finding out in what sort of detail history was studied by undergraduates and postgraduate students, and in particular how far attention was paid to original documents and other similar source materials. That I never learned anything about the actual teaching of history was in itself significant, though not an accident, for I never visited the history department,

nor did I ever meet anyone engaged in teaching history. Instead, on a day so wet as to discourage more than a very perfunctory tour of the partly prewar, partly new campus, I talked - and sipped the inevitable green tea - with the president of the University and with Comrade Wang of the history faculty. Mr. Wang turned out to be not a teacher but an administrative dean or tutor whose only contact with strictly academic matters was in arranging the timetable of classes. The conversation, carefully recorded by a secretary, started with an introductory talk by the president, which was followed by questions put by me to Mr. Wang. In its much greater concern for the directly political rather than the intellectual content of education it contrasted with conversations I had in other places in China - factories, for example - where after an obeisance to politics, the discussion usually turned to technical or other factual matters.

I learned that the University had been founded sixty-three years earlier as Central University. There had been great changes since liberation (1949), with a reorganization of departments, a tenfold increase in the number of students, and above all a change in their class background. There were now six thousand students in twelve faculties, comprising eight natural sciences - physics, chemistry, mathematics, astronomy, biology, geology, meteorology and geography - and four humanities - Chinese language and literature, history, political science and foreign languages. Students of the natural sciences were in the majority. Of those taking arts subjects, foreign linguists were the most numerous, as they were needed as teachers in middle schools and also as translators and interpreters. Historians, besides becoming teachers themselves, might become cadres; the same was true of students of political science. There was a staff of one thousand, of whom half were teachers.

The faculties had been rationalized to avoid duplication with the activities of other universities. For example, the astronomy department, which in twenty-eight years before liberation graduated only forty students, now produced that number each year. They were following Marx's goal of concentrating twenty years in a day. This meant that some other universities had lost their departments of astronomy, as Nanking had lost its law faculty. The library had grown enormously, from 700,000 volumes to 1,500,000, and the number of laboratories had increased from twenty five to one hundred and twenty. The University was pressed for space, like their Western counterparts, but new buildings were going up all the time.

The main task of the University was to implement the education policy, according to which education must serve the needs of proletarian politics and must be combined with productive labour. "We want to train personnel for socialist development morally, intellectually and physically", said the president. "As Chairman Mao pointed out, we have to train workers with socialist consciousness and culture as well as intellectual attainments. Our students must learn both from mental and physical work." In order to accomplish the task of the University, they had adopted a six-point programme. The order in which the points were listed seems significant.

(1) "We open the door to students from worker and peasant families. Children from these backgrounds have much more opportunity to attend universities than they did before liberation. In those days only 1% of students throughout the country came from such backgrounds, whereas now they account for over 70% at this University." This percentage was increasing all the time, I was later told by Mr. Wang. The criterion for selecting students was based partly on professional aptitude (assessed by examination) and partly on political considerations, in other words, the candidate's class background and ideology. As a concomitant of this policy, 75% of the students had grants to support them while studying, though these evidently only had to cover food, clothing and recreation, as tuition, lodging and medical care were free for all. As a result, students from poor backgrounds had a much greater sense of security and did not have to look for jobs.

(2) "Political-ideological education is carried out here, in order to train students to serve the majority in China and in the world as a whole. First, we ask our students to be revolutionary. All students devote a lot of time to the theoretical study of politics - philosophy, political economy and the history of the Chinese Communist Party. We also teach current affairs here, to enable students to understand great events both at home and abroad, and to take an active interest in them. We are especially concerned at present with the Vietnam situation and the opposition to U.S. aggression. There are current affairs classes at least once a week. Also we teach the students Communist morality, sometimes alternating this with current affairs. Finally, all courses are deeply imbued with political significance, and of course political education is furthered by the students' experience of physical labour."

(3) "Every student must participate in six weeks of manual labour each year. This is apart from the eight weeks of university vacation. The labour course is part of the teaching plan. It takes place in various people's communes in the countryside, largely, though some labour is performed in the city, either in factories or for the benefit of the public as a whole, as with tree planting. Students also assist in the manual work needed for the running of the University. Through manual labour we aim to cultivate the point of view of labour in each student, thus strengthening the links between the educated workers and the working masses and increasing our understanding of the feelings of the masses. So when we go to the communes and to the factories, we share the same food, the same lodgings and the same labour as the masses. Whereas in the past students were trained to serve the bourgeoisie and the KMT reactionaries, now they are trained to serve the people."

(4) "The quality of the teaching here is being raised. Generally students study here for about five years. For the first three years they take general courses in fundamental subjects, then they can specialize for the last two years. In the history department, for instance, there are two special sections for the final years - Chinese history and world history. In the last term, that is the final six months of their course, they have to prepare a graduation thesis."

(5) "We pay great attention to physical culture and spare time activities. Apart from physical culture classes, the students have constant physical exercise through their manual work. There is a sports meeting each year, and also regular competitions in various ball games. There is an artistic troupe organized by the students which puts on singing, dancing, orchestral and other music, opera and so forth. A festival is staged on May 4th, which is Youth Day, and evening performances are given regularly by student groups."

(6) "Teaching work. Since teachers have to work hard to improve their teaching standards, and thus raise the general educational level of the people, they have to study politics and participate in productive physical labour, usually for one month of the year. It is part of their education, for those who educate others must first be educated themselves. Of course, physical labour is not

required of the old or weak.

"The development of research work is of great importance for the raising of teaching standards. A big scientific seminar is held by the University each year, at which articles written by the teaching staff of the various faculties are presented. Last year there were over three hundred papers. The audience includes scholars from other universities. Disputes can arise in the discussions which take place at these seminars, and in one instance, a controversy has been going on for seven years over a paper on the granite rocks of South China presented by the geology faculty. In scientific research," said the president, "diversity of opinion is very important; in our scientific policy we are implementing the principle of 'Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom, and a Thousand Schools of Thought Contend'."

I was told that on the average the teaching staff were able to devote about a third of their time to their own research, though it varied in individual cases. In addition, there were advanced postgraduate students on special three year courses who did some research, with the object of becoming teachers themselves. During these advanced courses, however, they did not do any teaching as assistants. Postgraduates fell into two categories - those who had just graduated, and those who had already worked for some years as teachers or as technicians before returning for the advanced course.

The president summed up his talk: "These, then, are our tasks - to produce scientific instructors and cadres to serve the revolutionary cause and to serve the needs of proletarian politics, new men who can do both mental work and physical labour."

I asked how often the students were examined. At the end of every term, Mr. Wang said, there were examinations for a week, and from time to time less formal tests were set. In some faculties students would be assigned essays to write, though not on any regular basis. In the fourth year, and again in the fifth, a thesis had to be written. It appeared that there were no fixed rules as to how many times a student might fail his examinations without being relegated or expelled. The authorities would give separate consideration to the circumstances of each such student, and this would include consideration of his political status. Moreover, no class lists were published after examinations or at the time of graduation, though each student would be told his own marks, which would of course

be taken into consideration when the time came for him to be assigned to a job.

My questions about history teaching specifically did not produce any detailed information beyond the fact that in their final two years students could choose the special subjects for their theses from a number of topics in the history of China and the rest of the world. Specimen subjects were: the T'aip'ing Rebellion, the development of Chinese capitalism in the Ming and Ch'ing periods, the English Chartist Movement, and the growth of popular opposition to imperialism in Africa. I was told that these subjects were studied in "great detail", but Mr. Wang could not tell me how many hours of lectures or seminars would be devoted to such a special topic each week, let alone what sources or teaching methods were in use.

There was nothing unusual about this interview and the policy which it disclosed, either in the emphasis on ideological education through the twin vehicles of direct political instruction and manual labour with the broad masses, or in the de-emphasis - even for the benefit of a foreigner - of the intellectual quality of the academic courses. Yet this is the system which is now under attack as insufficiently radical and as reflecting what some second-year palaeontology students in Peking called "the corrosive effects of bourgeois ideology coming in through various channels".

Of these channels the most important is the examination system and the part it plays in university selection. The fact that academic qualifications play any part at all in the selection of students is apparently intolerable to persons of progressive opinions. As the Peking Review put it: "For a long time now the broad masses of workers, peasants and soldiers, and revolutionary students and teachers have made it clear that they are very angry about the old entrance examination system.....It places not proletarian but bourgeois politics in command, it places school marks in command..... This system is a great obstacle to the revolutionizing of young people's minds and encourages them to become bourgeois specialists by the bourgeois method of "making one's own way" and achieving individual fame, wealth and position." Or, in the words of a student in Shanghai: "We want to be tested in the three great revolutionary movements - class struggle, the struggle for production and scientific experiment. Our examination halls are in the factories and in the villages, and the most important content for our examinations is the creative study and application of Chairman Mao's works."

Instead of the present system, in which at least some weight is given to the student's academic performance, there will be, as we have seen above, a new method combining recommendation and selection, in which proletarian politics are put first, students being selected for the universities for their "outstanding moral, intellectual and physical qualities". The ambitious will clearly in the future have to devote themselves more to political self-perfection, possibly at the extent of their studies.

It is not only the examination system which is to be changed, however. The Peking Review quotes with approval the complaint of Lo Kuei-yl, a middle school student of the Chuang national minority in Kwangsi Province: ".....in the past the teachers demanded that we concentrate only on our textbooks, thereby diverting our attention from politics. Acting on their instructions, we took notes in class, learnt the notes by heart before examinations and answered examination questions in accordance with the notes, and then we forgot everything we had learnt right after the examinations. Such an educational system cannot lead us to devote ourselves to serving the people. It can only lead us in the opposite direction and is therefore diametrically opposed to the aspirations of the working people. We must completely smash it." The Review comments that "It is not only the system of enrolment that requires transforming, all the arrangements for schooling, for testing, for going up or not going up to the higher class and so on must be transformed, and so must the content of education." Chairman Mao's works can, and must, form the basis of school education at every level from primary school upwards.

Finally, it is clear that the teachers themselves, in both middle schools and universities, have a bleak time ahead. Even those who are not attacked in the present campaign as "scholar-tyrants in the field of ideology" will have to bear the brunt of a situation in which students are admitted to institutes of higher education regardless of their academic qualifications or lack of them. The effects of this situation must be incalculable - and progressive - on academic standards generally. Difficulties have already been noticed by foreigners teaching languages in China.

There is nothing intrinsically new in the educational ideas now being put forward. Starting with the half-work, half-study principle introduced two or three years ago and now to be extended, an immense

effort has already been made to associate the students with the toiling masses and to break down the age old Chinese distinction between those who work with their hands and those who work with their minds. A similar assault has also been made on the similarly old and potent respect traditionally felt by students for their teachers. Nor is there anything new about the introduction of the Maoist canon as the philosophical foundation for all learning - occupying a position with regard to the training of the elite which has striking similarities with the position of the Confucian classics in the days of the old imperial examination system.

What seems to be new in the present campaign is the change of the emphasis and the increased sense of urgency in what many observers see as a race against time to establish a new revolutionary generation before the present higher leadership of the Party dies out. What is particularly striking, if we are to believe what we read, is the price that the leadership is apparently prepared to pay. For with the growing rejection of the value of learning in all its branches, can the standards required for the scientific, technological and administrative direction of a huge and increasingly complex society be adequately maintained, far less raised?

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Anthony R. D'Amico". The signature is written in dark ink and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Received in New York July 19, 1966