

The So-Called "Middle Class" in China

by Sidney J Gluck

The current formation of economic groups with private agendas in the modernization and opening to the West has engendered an increase in contradictions in socialism with Chinese characteristics. It is important that these groups be accommodated in the development of socialism. It would be a mistake to adopt the concept of the so-called "middle class," especially as developed by US capitalism, as a basis for understanding the nature of these private-interest groups. For that reason, a deeper study of the question is necessary. A democratic solution must be formulated over time to accommodate legitimate interests while maintaining stability and growth for the success of socialism. It is also important to maintain an independent ideological attitude to counter the influence, both overtly and covertly, of Western ideas that have come with the opening. Before China's modernization experience, the task of economic unification of modern nations had fallen to the leadership of the capitalist class in each country. China is the first nation where unification has been under the Communist Party, essentially representing the workers and peasants. This leaves an entirely different historic stamp on the development of the base and superstructure from an ideological point of view and its direction, not to build capitalism, but to build socialism. The first use of the term "middle class" in the United States came into being in the early part of the 19th century, approximately 1825 to 1830. Economic groups of independent producers, such as journeymen and intellectual services developed as adjuncts to the growing capitalist base led by merchants, banks, and landowners who employed workers and slaves at the base of early capitalism. Clearly these were "middle" elements between two class extremes. Many in these groups actually became part of the working class, often as high-paid, technically matured workers, necessary to the base of production and circulation. It was Lenin who emphasized the nature of classes as they relate to production and circulation of capital and commodities at the base of a society's economy. Beyond that, the activity of individuals and groups serving in the superstructure of society ranging in all forms of intellectual activities as well as those who engaged in the control of state power (police, courts, prisons, and the army) function in one form or another as elements independent of but interrelated with the base. Under capitalism, as we noted, the base clearly has two classes at opposite poles; this is not true in a socialist-market economy. At its base are the producers and entrepreneurs ranging in many varied socio-economic forms, be it state ownership, collective ownership, public ownership, private ownership, joint ventures, and foreign ownership, as well as independent producers. The latter do not form a class of exploiters, though being the most complex combination of forms of ownership and control; it engenders many complexities and contradictions in relationships. None the less, the "middle" service and entrepreneurial elements can hardly be identified as similar to the so-called "middle" elements under capitalism.

New terminology should be found to delineate the historically developed difference in the base and superstructure of capitalist and socialist societies. This would make it clearer in accommodating new and expanding economic freedoms with new forms of political expression. The inconclusive definition of "middle class" is useful as a capitalist tool for deception to enhance political control by the ruling class. Many in the higher strata of income, though equally exploited, are given the illusion of being above the

lower levels of their own class. This is essentially a political tool which the Chinese do not need.

The Chinese government has legitimized the existence of entrepreneurial groups as necessary and part of the productive base, generating growth not only in jobs and the domestic market but a considerable portion of exports which strengthen the economic position of China in world integration. Furthermore, the Chinese Communist Party has invited entrepreneurs to join its ranks. The Communist Party has also established special schools to retrain their own superstructural cadres into understanding the nature of economic groups and the need to eliminate corruption in their relations with private groups and assist in carrying out the necessary political and economic functions to guarantee compromises and concessions among the competing groups in order to guarantee stability and progress. Much of the reorientation reflects the need within the one-party system to clearly understand the contradictory group relations seeking political expression to guide the direction of the socialist economy so solutions can be found centrally, in the provinces, the big cities, and down to the villages to guarantee progress towards socialism - please, not capitalism.

By contrast, in the USSR Stalin's denial of market relations and refusal to allow creative individuals with entrepreneurial bent to participate in socialist construction were weaknesses in the soviet model of socialism. Instead there were two levels of workers, basic and superstructural, and social ownership and control by the party and government with little public input for lack of legitimized interest groups or forms of democratic expression. When "Collective Ownership" collapsed, ministers with financial backers bought off natural assets and means of production in a stampede "Cowboy Capitalism" and superexploitation of a "Free" working class, creating total chaos.

"Middle" elements are not decisive; but even under capitalism these "middle" elements can be won to the main line to the interests of all working people to make progress while freeing the country of exploitation. It is believed by some in the USA that so-called "middle class" elements who are essentially part of the working class will, in conjunction with demands of the working class, be part of a movement that will eventually revolutionize the system. In China, all groups must be pointed to the success of the five- and ten-year plans since the entire nation will benefit. That is the approach as distinct from capitalist maneuvering "middle class" concepts. There is of course a danger of corruption and Western influence. It is a fact that whether under the Clinton strategic partnership or the Bush strategic competition, economic containment, and military threats, the underlying propagandistic approach is based on influencing what they conceive as a kind of "middle class" in China that they have been able to hoodwink to a great extent in the United States. They base their hopes on influencing that segment of Chinese society which can be reached through superstructural contacts as part of a spying system which utilizes intellectuals, students, small and medium businessmen, tradesman, financial agents, etc. Witness operations of the CIA over the years in Central and South America as well as other parts of the world.

China's independence of Western domination, particularly USA bullying, while integrated with all Western economies, gives it great strength to survive and grow even if a world economic crisis develops in the West. China's tempo of development and growth of internal social capital combined with a definite economic plan to build up the underdeveloped areas, create jobs and train its population in all forms of high-tech,

whether industrial or agrarian, will be its contribution to world stability. Truly democratic solutions of the contradictions endemic in a mixed economic structure will guarantee success.

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