

China Watch by Gregory F. Buhyoff

Peking looks for a 'Third Way'

P.R.C. leaders are courting the underdeveloped nations, scorning U.S. trade, and boosting the "peace movement."

The People's Republic of China has been increasingly sending signals of its desire to distance itself from the United States and position Peking as the leader of a "Third Way." In line with more traditional Maoist rhetoric, Peking is proclaiming its status as a Third World country, sympathetic to the oppressed and opposed to "both superpowers."

Peking's diplomacy includes not only the Third World—it also includes courtship of the Europeans and Japanese including increasing contacts with the European Social Democracy, with independent "Eurocommunists," and with the oligarchies of the Old World. Peking's latest policy line in fact converges with the current Anglo-French moves toward positioning Europe "between" Moscow and Washington.

The Chinese policy is not an ideological shift; it is for the most part a pragmatic assessment of the decline of the United States as a power and hence its declining usefulness to China as a weapon to keep the Soviet Union at bay.

The gloomy Chinese view of the United States first came into public view at the beginning of this year and has since become more obvious. In January the Xinhua News Agency declared in various releases, "The United States is no longer what it was in the 1940s or 1950s. . . . In its contentions with the Soviets over the past year, the

United States has not freed itself from its passive, disadvantageous position. The reason is its many weaknesses." On June 25 another official release said that Washington is "on the defensive and Moscow on the offensive" in the battle for world hegemony.

The apparent thaw in Sino-Soviet relations over the recent period should be seen less as a unified move in Peking toward rapprochement than a move to cover its position vis-à-vis the Soviets in light of the erosion of the U.S. capabilities.

Earlier this year, its growing reservations about U.S. military might notwithstanding, Peking still expressed a desire for economic relations to be increased. China at the time still saw a role for the United States as a source of technology and investment. However, even this has been called into question.

According to the Hong Kong-affiliated Overseas Chinese media, a high-level conference of P.R.C. economists and scholars took place this May in Peking during which a detailed critique was made of the U.S. economy, noting particularly inflation, high interest rates, low productivity, and unemployment. It was concluded, according to these reports, that since there is presently little U.S. investment in China and little could be expected in the future, given U.S. economic problems, it would not matter if there were no trade with the United States. The *People's Daily* said at

the end of June that "the U.S. economy will still stagnate in the second half of this year." China is now courting closer economic ties with Japan to supplant the role assigned to the United States.

China is engaged in furious diplomacy throughout the Third World, particularly Africa and the Mideast, upholding Third World interests and "solidarity" in the best tradition of Mao Tse-tung. The shift was confirmed most clearly in a recent issue of the important analytical journal *Ban Yue Tan*, which said, "China's foreign policy can be summed up in three sentences: strengthen unity and cooperation with the Third World; opposes hegemonism; and preserve world peace." These three basic points specifically echo on Chairman Mao Tse-tung's theory of the "three worlds." On the question of hegemonism Vice-Premier Wan Li told a visiting Japanese newspaper editor that U.S. "hegemonism" rivals that of the Soviet Union.

Consistent with such Third Way developments, China has made an about-face in its assessment of the international "peace movement," which as late as this spring was the object of Peking's apprehension as a "Kremlin-inspired" plot to put the West at a disadvantage.

But on June 2, the official *People's Daily* approvingly described the movement as a "broadly based" upsurge, stating, "The spearhead of the peace movement in Europe and America is directed against the Soviet Union and the United States. . . . All people know that it is precisely these two superpowers—the Soviet Union and the United States—which are frenziedly engaged in an arms race that is threatening world peace."