

Emergency in China: more than the floods

by Michael Billington

The worst floods of the century have swept through the Yangtze Valley of China, causing the People's Republic to call for international disaster relief for the first time in its 42-year history. The death count is well over 1,000 and damage estimates are over \$3 billion, but the worst is expected over the next six weeks, as the annual flood season has just begun. Already, in the two most severely flooded provinces, over 80 million people are affected, with one-fourth of them suffering from dysentery or malaria from the polluted water, and over 10 million have "lost everything." The impact on the summer crop has not been estimated, but it may be catastrophic.

This may be the spark that ignites a holocaust in China, a disaster that was waiting to happen. Nor should this be perceived as a "natural disaster" in the normal sense. The floods would have been avoided or minimized if the Three Gorges Dam on the upper Yangtze River had been constructed, as is well known to those (both inside and outside of China) who have sabotaged the project repeatedly over the past 70 years. First proposed by Dr. Sun Yat-sen as a central aspect of his infrastructure development plans, the dam was designed precisely to prevent the disaster that otherwise is inevitable from the flooding of the Yangtze, while also providing the energy necessary to develop the Chinese heartland. The failure to carry it through was a conscious decision to sacrifice thousands, perhaps millions, of lives.

The potential deadly consequences of such a disaster are exacerbated by the inadequacy of transportation, distribution, storage, and other basic infrastructure, which, combined with the over 100 million "blind flow" army of unemployed created by the economic breakdown of the last few years, create the conditions for holocaust. During the past 12 years of reform designed by Henry Kissinger and his friend Deng Xiaoping, already scarce capital was diverted from the agricultural and industrial infrastructure of the nation to facilitate the inflow of foreign investments in the cheap labor markets set up as free trade zones along the coast, on the model of the 19th-century colonial concessions.

The economic emergency preceded floods. In the last week of June, before the severity of the floods was apparent, the Beijing government released an "emergency notice" ordering all departments to limit purchase of "luxury items," such as cars, with public funds. Since nearly all cars, and

many other items, are *only* purchased by government departments, these are drastic measures. This was caused by the leap in inflation to about 9% in the major cities. Inflation was brought down to 2% through brutal austerity measures in 1989-90, then, in a typical swing to the other extreme, money was poured into the collapsing state industries, leading to renewed production but at even lower productivity, with no buyers, and renewed inflation. *China Daily* reports that this is "reminiscent of what happened nearly three years ago" when inflation set off the crisis that led to the retrenchment, and to the Tiananmen democracy movement of 1989.

New cultural revolution?

The worst danger is that the mounting repression, instability, and poverty have generated the potential for a return to the mass psychosis of the 1966-76 Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Although the memory of that period of terror and genocide is still fresh, the systematic assault on the process of creative thinking is being unleashed again as national policy. The murder or incarceration of the cream of the youth after the Tiananmen Square crackdown began a process of government and Communist Party attacks on so-called "peaceful evolution," defined as the strategy of China's enemies to subvert the People's Republic by the cultural infiltration of "bourgeois liberalism" and decadent Western ideology. The irony is that the regime is in fact embracing the decadence of the bankrupt "fast money" economy of the West with their coastal free trade zone policy. The "anti-peaceful evolution" campaign is actually targeted against the outbreak of any creative thinking based on universal principles of natural law, just as during the Cultural Revolution. Already, half of the university students are being sent to the countryside to "learn from the peasants" in a return to the practices of the Cultural Revolution.

One would think that such policies would have to be introduced under another guise to circumvent the hated memories of that dark period. But this year has seen a vigorous attempt to revive Mao Zedong's image, with hundreds of new books, films, and TV broadcasts filling the land with stories of the Great Helmsman. A group of leading figures has even called for a "comprehensive re-evaluation" of the Cultural Revolution itself.

Another Beijing official is quoted in the Hong Kong paper *Ching Ming*: "I was opposed to the Cultural Revolution, but I agree with many of Chairman Mao's directives. For example, we must stage a criticism campaign against the bourgeoisie, we must foster proletarian ideology and eliminate bourgeois ideology, intellectuals must undergo re-education, and young people should go wherever the country needs them most. . . . Although we have decided that no more nationwide political campaigns will be launched, local and short campaigns still have to be waged to oppose bourgeois liberalization. We must firmly keep ideology under our control."