

Social Justice and Equality? - No Place for Real Marxists in Communist China

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Students are finding out the hard way that there is a huge gap between pure Marxism and the Chinese brand.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded on the ideological foundation of Marxism in 1921 and led the country to a revolution-fueled bloody civil war, in which the communists emerged victorious in 1949. As the sole party ruling China, the CCP adopted Marxism Leninism along with Mao Zedong's Thought as its - and thus the country's - guiding ideological principles. However, though the CCP continues to rhetorically champion the cause of the less fortunate, the party has turned into a club of billionaires and millionaires since 2002, when Party boss Jiang Zemin welcomed the super rich to become members. This was major shift for the CCP and its identity as the vanguard of the working class. At present there are more than 100 billionaires in the upper echelons of Chinese leadership as members and/or advisors to CCP leadership [1]. Their wealth keeps flourishing under President Xi Jinping.

Nevertheless, the CCP still extols the contribution of Marxism to China's development and its relevance in realizing Xi's China Dream. On the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birthday, China dispatched a bronze statue of the German thinker to his home country as a gift [2] and the Chinese ambassador hailed Marx for his contribution to the progressive advancement of China. Xi also lavishly praised Marx as the greatest modern thinker [3] and called for Party members to study and practice Marxism in their quest for the revival of the Middle Kingdom.

However, leaving aside the diplomatic niceties and official rhetoric, the reality of Marxism as guiding principle based on which the one-party state runs China needs more scrutiny - not only from a polemical standpoint but as a practical reality check.

With a monopoly over political power, the CCP regime decides which ideology is legal and which interpretation is correct. The ideological supervision of the Party has further tightened under Xi, with the launch of a ban on teaching of certain subjects like press freedom and rule of law in 2013 [4]. Under Xi's ideological suppression in this "new era," even some adherents of Marxism face restrictions in their belief and practice. This is due to the clash between the rhetoric and reality of Marxism in China. The educational system tailored by the party-state has striking stripes of Marxist colors - and if one cares or dares to compare this state-sanctioned philosophy with the actual structural scene of present Chinese society, there will be many uneasy gaps and holes. The rift between reality and rhetoric becomes more visible when one looks at the condition of Chinese workers, who often struggle to recoup long-delayed wages and face poor working conditions.

The good news is that some people in China are bold enough to face this inconvenient truth.

These Marxist champions are, surprisingly, not those CCP cadres who sing the virtues of communism in public forums or in the press. Rather, they are a group of students from some of

China's most prestigious universities such as Peking University. Interestingly, they seem not to have realized that what began as solidarity with workers would put them on the list of unwanted social elements — until armed police in riot gear raided the apartment where they were gathered for some labor-related activities in Huizhou [5]. In a matter of minutes, their plan was aborted and even worst, their convictions were questioned. However, the struggles of these young Marxists did not end there.

Back in Beijing, it is reported that a student-led Marxist Society of Peking University is on the brink of closure [6] as it cannot get necessary backing from faculty to renew its registration. This is probably owing to political pressure from the authorities, as members of the society are active with labor rights and gender issues, including organizing activities in support of the workers' movement. The party-state does not permit independent trade unions and any attempt to that end is a challenge to the absolute position of the CCP. Still, the pressure on a Marxist Society at Peking University could be bit unsettling for some and outrageous for others – especially if they remember what Xi recently said about the pivotal role their university played in studying and spreading the ideals of Marxism in China during his visit to the university in May.

It could be discouraging for these young Marxists that there is no space for them to carry forward the ideals of communism into concrete actions – ironically, in a state that calls itself socialist and supposedly is working toward the creation of socialist paradise. Nevertheless, everything is not lost in darkness; the realization that there is no place for the true practice of Marxist ideas itself is a victory over decades of the CCP's political propaganda and social manipulation. In fact, it can be considered as a big triumph for those who truly believe in the cause of socialism in China. Now they can explore new ways and strategies to overcome the challenges in front of them. This realization is also crucial for political analysts to have a nuanced sense of the political development and direction in the wannabe next superpower.

The communist regime in Beijing is not really communist in the true sense of the term, though it has never failed to glorify itself as the “vanguard of workers.” However, the close nexus between the powerful and wealthy means that the interests of capitalists are far better protected than those of the proletariat and peasants. Over the years, labor-related social unrest has increased in the form of strikes and protests as disgruntled workers find no medium to voice their grievances outside the Party-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions. Their attempts to establish independent trade unions have been unsuccessful and their Marxism-inspired student supporters have officially been accused of creating social disorder – a sensitive issue for an authoritarian system acutely obsessed with social and political stabilities.

For the one party-state, communism is both a sword and shield with which it can attack or defend depending on the target and situation. This month, as the CCP basks in the celebration of its 69th anniversary of coming to power, an official commentary promised a bright future for the Chinese people under the supreme leadership of the Communist Party [7]. As for the aspiring Marxists, however, the Party continues to encourage them to study its version of Marxism — and that should not be misunderstood as to actively promote core principles like social justice and equality.

In other words, Xi may want China's people to be Marxist thinkers but not Marxist doers.

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P.S.

- The Diplomat, October 06, 2018:

<https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/no-place-for-real-marxists-in-communist-china/>

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Footnotes

[1] <https://www.businessinsider.in/Communist-China-has-104-billionaires-leading-the-country-while-Xi-Jinping-promises-to-lift-millions-out-of-poverty/articleshow/63141726.cms>

[2] <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/europe/article/2144859/karl-marx-german-birthplace-unveils-chinese-made-statue-200th>

[3] http://xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/05/c_137156646.htm

[4] ESSF (article 46390), [Civil rights, press freedom... Seven subjects off limits for teaching, Chinese universities told.](#)

[5] <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-china-labour-protests/student-activists-disappear-in-southern-china-after-police-raid-idUKKCN1L90XZ>

[6] <https://www.ft.com/content/ccab09aa-bdc2-11e8-8274-55b72926558f>

[7] http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-10/01/c_129964757.htm