

YOUNG PIONEERS

May Fourth Manifesto

RED BANNERS, red flags, red carpets. The people in the Great Hall appear to be red beings themselves. If you lift your head, you can see the meeting is commemorating the centenary of the May Fourth Movement of 1919. The characters written aloft are so grand yet so false that they invite derision.

For at this very moment, on so-called 'red' youth day, six progressive students of Peking University are in detention for no reason.

In the commemoration conference, they are singing, 'The mission of national rejuvenation will be accomplished in struggle.' On the banners overhead, the slogans read: 'Strive to write the magnificent contribution of youth to the realization of the China dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.' The young people sitting in their seats are listening intently, noting down in frenzied fashion every word of the General Secretary.

Yet just two days ago, students on Peking University campus were pushed down to the ground, hands held behind their back, dragged into police cars, kicked and beaten.

Just yesterday, the sun of eight or nine in the morning witnessed the disappearance of six students.' The last sound from them was their voices telephoning their parents, crying: 'Bad news, I've been arrested.'

They are not law-breaking criminals. All they did was remain loyal to Marxism, seeking to commit their youth to the cause of workers, as the centenary of May Fourth and the international labour day of May First approached.

It is bright and spacious inside the Great Hall, and people there are dressed very respectably, entranced by the repeated words, 'Youth, time, commitment'. Outside, however, no 'movement' is allowed. On pain of otherwise incurring the incriminating pretext of 'disturbing public order', all that is permitted is watching sports.

This is a festive day that has been profaned. This is a spirit that has been profaned. The real banner of May Fourth, if we do not fight for it, will soon be stained and vanish into darkness.

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A hundred years ago, inspired by calls to fight for national sovereignty and do away with national traitors, on the Fourth of May students boycotted classes, workers held strikes, merchants boycotted markets, and people everywhere threw themselves into a tidal wave of protest by boycotting Japanese goods, in an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal movement that spread like wildfire across the country. This was a great mass explosion. It saw the Chinese working class stepping onto the stage of history for the first time as an independent force. It began the glorious tradition of solidarity between progressive intellectuals and the working class.

This movement swept away old corruption and brought in things that were new. Culturally, it demolished the authoritarian, corrupt, oppressive, hierarchical structures of the traditional feudal order, spreading the new ideas of democracy, science, liberty and equality. Politically, it enlarged the camp of fighters against imperialism and feudalism: of workers, students and broad masses exploring the socialist path of demands for social equality and national liberation, and so furthering the dissemination of Marxism in China and the preconditions for founding the CCP.

Looking back today, those battle-cries belong to history, and that great movement lies a hundred years in the past.

A century later, the wheels of history have rolled forward, and changes shaking the heavens have occurred in China. Thirty years after the May Fourth movement, revolution triumphed, and the construction of socialism began in a New China, where the dreams of these forebears came to pass.

Yet sixty years after the May Fourth movement, a group of power-holding capitalist-roaders inside the Party betrayed socialism. Singing the high-pitched tune of 'whoever can catch the mouse is a good cat', they took the capitalist road of 'letting some people get rich first'.

¹ 'The sun of eight or nine in the morning': ironic allusion to Mao's words to Chinese students and trainees in Moscow in 1957: 'You young people, full of vigour and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you. The world belongs to you. China's future belongs to you.'

In the forty years since the Open Door policy, China has fast-forwarded along the road of a developmental market economy, simultaneously creating a 'China Miracle' that has stunned the world, and leaving behind a coiled fuse of countless social problems.

The market economy has presided over the marriage of power and money. Bureaucrats have been transformed from 'servants of the people' into 'masters of the people'. Polarizations between rich and poor have become ever more extreme in the 'spring breeze' of the Reform Era. Today a mere 0.4 per cent of the population owns 70 per cent of total social wealth. The three richest persons in China are worth 800 billion RMB.

Labourers have changed from 'masters of the country' into 'slaves of sweat and blood', living in basements, eating pickles and steamed buns, wearing so-called safety helmets that crack at the first hit, working hard all their lives, earning at the end of them only illnesses in every part of their bodies.

Knowledge can be measured by money. Life can be measured by money. Personality can also be measured by money . . . ideas are controlled, speech is censored, while feudal notions and slavish beliefs like 'men are the heaven and women are the Earth', or the Confucian hierarchy of monarch-minister/father-son, all see a revival today.

While red flags can be seen everywhere, today it is like living in the areas under KMT control before 1949. Obviously, it was workers who created the economic miracle with their own hands. But it is a privileged class that utterly monopolizes wealth and power. Whose 'rejuvenation' is this? Whose 'rise' is this?

It is not the rejuvenation of the Chinese people. It is the rejuvenation of the bourgeois class. It is not the rise of a socialist China. It is the rise of a new empire.

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Today the greatest obstacle to the radical May Fourth spirit of progress, democracy and science taking root in China is the bureaucratic bourgeois class.

The greatest obstacle to social progress in China is the bureaucratic bourgeois class.

The greatest enemy of the Chinese working class is the bureaucratic bourgeois class.

In addition to exploiting the workers' direct labour to extract surplus-value from them, this class exploits them a second time over by the continuous marketization of housing, healthcare and education. At the same time, it controls social opinion and the reproduction of ideology, ceaselessly promoting Confucian 'family tradition', 'women's virtue' and other conservative feudal ideas, harshly suppressing any voices that might challenge them, subjugating every aspect of society to the service of capital.

Where there is oppression, there will be resistance.

In the spring and summer of 30 years ago, progressive college students marched to Tiananmen Square, fighting against bureaucratization, corruption, inflation, official profiteering and control of free speech, all deteriorating during the first ten years of reform. They demanded democracy, liberty, science and the rule of law, hoping to accomplish a modernization of China. That movement was initiated by students in Beijing, eventually mobilizing over a hundred thousand students throughout the country, and hundreds of thousands of Beijing citizens. There is no question of its progressive significance and historical achievements.

However, the greatest road-blocks to democracy and freedom are the exploitative relations of capitalism. So long as you are not walking on the road to socialism, which lies beyond capitalism, there is no way of answering the questions of democracy and freedom.

So what is the social responsibility of youth today?

It does not lie in the empty talk of 'great rejuvenation' and 'national self-strengthening'. It lies instead in our social consciousness, in throwing our lives into a mass movement of opposition to the mighty and to capital—in taking once again the path of democracy, science and equality. In that process, young people will gradually discover that 'only Marxism can save China'.

This 'movement' shall not be subdued or silenced, nor reduced to mere life within the Great Hall. Those students who went out to protest in Tianmen county in Hubei, those who are fighting the hired thugs in Nanjing, and those countless others in conflict with their college bureaucracy form the youth of our time who dare to charge forward. In them, the spirit of May Fourth is burning with a bright flame.

Today's youth should not fight just for a democracy on campus for themselves. More importantly, they should also fan out to the zones of industry, to the countryside, to the widest fields of social life.

Today's youth should not only dare to fight against authoritarian power. More importantly, they should also dare to unite with the broadest masses of workers and peasants, to fight on the front of their struggles.

Remember at every moment—the new society we are fighting for is one led by the working class, one that truly makes people the masters of their own lives, that firmly rejects exploitation or oppression of one class by another, that seeks equality and the free, all-round development of every human being. The road may not be smooth for us; it will be hard and long. But let us go forward in struggle together, arm in arm, and it's not impossible we'll see the day when the clouds have cleared and all mists are gone.