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Return of the Red Menace

China-bashing by the U.S. Media Since Hong Kong’s Reversion

HENRY ROSEMONT, JR.

In the six months prior to Hong Kong’s reversion to China on the first of July, the U.S. print and broadcast media devoted a great many column inches, and much time, to speculating on the colony’s future, almost all of it worriedly. Given how little Hong Kong has and will directly affect the average American, the continuous media blitz must seem surprising, at least at first blush.

To be sure, the Chinese official media also made much of the reversion, although not expressing concern about the future of Hong Kong’s “democracy.” In the Chinese case the attention was understandable: with ever-increasing commercialism, deepening environmental degradation, and a continuously widening gap between the haves and have nots, the government manipulated the symbolism of the final lowering of the Union Jack in order to generate some patriotism to divert attention away from China’s growing social, economic, political and moral problems.

China’s Media Campaign

The Chinese patriotic propaganda campaign was largely a failure. During my most recent visit to Shanghai in May and June, my banquet hosts—largely businessmen and officials—regularly raised obligatory toasts to Hong Kong’s imminent return to the Motherland. Many of them, however, basically viewed the soon-to-be Special Administrative Region as competition more than anything else. Not altogether in jest, a few of them even allowed that if the central government showed too much favoritism toward Hong Kong, well, then, a resurgent Shanghai might just attempt to secede, and petition the U.S. for admission as the fifty-first state.

In remote rural areas during the same period I encountered a very different response, namely, indifference. Many villagers were not aware the reversion was to take place. The few who were aware attached little if any significance to the event. Hong Kong had not and would not have any impact on their lives, and might as well have been on Mars as on the Southern tip of their country. Moreover, they perceived Hong Kong people as no more like themselves than any other foreigners.

Migrant workers in the South, especially in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone just north of Hong Kong, had a still different, rather more humorous response: learning that China was taking over Hong Kong on July 1, hundreds of them believed that England was going to invade China on July 2 in retaliation. They left their jobs along the purported invasion route in droves, to the extreme consternation of their employers.

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Focus of U.S. Media

The U.S. media blitz was far more successful: anti-Chinese sentiments are higher now than at any time since the early 1950s, when the “blue ants” replaced the “Yellow Peril” and Fu Manchu’s successors began training the Manchurian candidate. The success is due, of course, to the media’s skill at manipulating and/or suppressing facts, and all but ignoring how things might have looked from a Chinese perspective. Some examples:

1) On Democracy. Many Americans believed that because Hong Kong was under British control, it must have enjoyed something like the representative democracy enjoyed by the English, and the U.S. media did little to overcome this misperception. Every educated Chinese, however, knows full well that for 151 of the 156 years of British rule, citizens of Hong Kong had no meaningful voice in government whatsoever. Hence the Chinese have much justification for questioning the sincerity of the British—and the U.S.—in their professed concern to protect the “democratic rights” of Hong Kong’s five million people.

Moreover, the U.S. media made much of China’s appointment of an interim legislature to replace the sitting legislature after July 1. In contrast, media were overwhelmingly silent about the fact that British Governor Christopher Patten unilaterally changed the rules in 1994 about how that sitting legislature was to be elected, and Beijing responded in kind. “Democracy” may indeed recede in the former Crown Colony, but worries about it are surely premature. The Chinese have promised that the elections of 1998 would be full and fair, and so, at the least, a wait-and-see attitude, rather than hysteria, would seem called for, especially when it is remembered that it is the Hong Kong engine that largely drives the mainland economy.

2) Freedom of the Press is supposedly endangered because of a new law prohibiting the defamation of high Chinese government officials. The Chinese found a sneaky way to do this, namely by taking the extant British law on public defamation and keeping it intact, except for inserting “Chinese Government Officials” and striking “The Royal Family.”

3) Freedom of Assembly. Again, much has been made of new Chinese laws for Hong Kong requiring official permission to hold demonstrations and rallies, and greatly restricting ties between local and overseas political organization. With regard to the former, new Chief Executive Tung Chee-Hwa says that the new law on demonstrations is patterned on those of England, Canada and Australia. And surely curbing foreign links to domestic political parties is a great infringement on political freedom; just ask the Chinese folk accused of shoveling money for the PRC to the Democratic National Committee. The double standard quadruples when one thinks of the benign response to the millions of dollars dumped into the U.S. political machine by the Taiwan lobby over the years.

Creating the Enemy

The list of distortions and omissions in the portrayal of the Hong Kong situation by the U.S. media could go on, but there is a larger question: why was (and is) it being done?

One reason is that some members of the U.S. elite see China as an economic threat to U.S. economic supremacy, and any threats to the all-good U.S. can only come from one evil empire or another. In the 1980s, Japan-bashing was a popular sport among economists, academics and policy makers—i.e., when Japan was riding an economic wave and out-performing the U.S. in virtually every productive area. The wave has crested, and so have most of the media-induced anti-Japanese sentiments. In the 1990s, Chinese economic ripples are on the horizon, necessitating the designation of another enemy.

A second reason, related to the first, is that Hong Kong has long since ceased being a major supplier of toys, clothing, Christmas ornaments and small appliances; these manufacturers have now moved to the North, to the Chinese mainland. Hong Kong still engages in production, but it is mostly hi-tech, high value-added manufacturing. The bulk of the economy has shifted to services, especially to multi-faceted financial services. The former colony is a major player in the arena in which the transnational corporations now hold their games, and those corporations don’t want any changing of the rules of the games that might restrict in any way their search for profits. Hence the Chinese government must be disabused of any idea that some of the fruits of the Hong Kong economy might go to providing social serves for the 1.2 billion—and growing—Chinese peoples.
Downsized of the World, Unite!

HANS KONING

The news these years is of globalization of American capitalism as an unstoppable process. But the societies of Western Europe, with Canada, the closest in structure to ours, began to show a resistance that could stop this, or—if we wanted—even reverse this process here at home.

Western Europe is seeing... a quiet, electoral revolution against the local governments drifting in the wake of the United States toward a globalized capitalism.

We are at a break in the times, less murderous than 30 years ago when RESIST issued the call to end the Vietnam War, but not less crucial to the immediate future of our society.

Here in the United States, the powers that be and the media that be are in hearty accord that ideology, let alone socialism, and not to mention communism, have gone into the dustbin of history (as Khrushchev used to call it). Willy or nilly, the media report the recent events in Europe with that conviction in mind. They can’t tell us enough times that the new British prime minister Tony Blair is a clone of Clinton if not of Thatcher, and that the election of the socialist Jospin in France is but a sign of the confusion of that country. After the May 1 British Elections, Warren Hoge of the New York Times wrote that “the Tories have now only five years to reverse the figures”—as if that was what everyone was now waiting for.

A German reduction in paid sick leave and free sanatorium vacations by about ten-percent appeared in the Times under the headline: “The German Welfare State Dies.” Radio WBUR in Boston had a post-French elections program beginning with two professors wringing their hands over the “French confusion,” and when I begged to differ, the host, Chris Lydon, asked me why I was the only person who didn’t think that way—blissfully ignoring some ten or fifteen million French voters.

But in truth, Western Europe and a considerable part of the rest of that continent is seeing a rebellion—a quiet, electoral revolution—against the local governments drifting in the wake of the United States toward a globalized capitalism. “We do not want to live like Anglo-Saxons,” the head of the main French labor union, the CGT, put it last winter, when the French, voting with their feet, had precisely stopped that drift (in public transport and road hauling) with nation-wide strikes, which made life quite difficult but were none the less supported by sixty to seventy percent of the population. He spoke those words before the British Labour Party victory, but “Anglo-Saxon” has really now become a code word in France for “American” anyway.

There was nothing “confused” about that statement. It means that a majority of the French voters are putting a certain quality of life, an idea of a “society of solidarity,” before worldwide competitiveness, before easy wealth (for a few percent of the nation, that is), and if push comes to shove, even before full employment; although there is ample economic proof that unemployment can be fought effectively without giving up on solidarity. In the Nineteenth Century, employers easily proved that if the workday was reduced from 12 hours to 10, that reduction would precisely wipe out their profits. It was a lie. In the same manner, they now demonstrate that a minimum wage and social benefits such as a full health insurance, will ruin their competitiveness. That, too, is a lie. (Check, for instance, for France, the report of 1994 “Fianancement de la Protection Sociale” by Jean-Marc Dupuis.)

This same concept was voted in England, in Holland, and in Scandinavia, and it certainly looks as if Germany will follow suit at their next elections.

I realize full well that it is far from impossible that the European voters will be cheated out of the fulfillment of their wishes. French president Chirac keeps announcing that the French simply “have to get used to Europe”—where “Europe” in this context means the United States economic model, run under the direction of a central bank steered by monetary considerations only, and overruling the social rules and laws of the 15 members of the European Union. In short, the kind of society William Jennings Bryant, Democratic nominee for the U.S. presidency, typified as “crucifying mankind upon a cross of gold.” That was in 1896 (one step forward, two steps back).

The entrepreneurs and the great speculators of these nineties, a century later, men (and a few women) who move factories and offices and billions of dollars around the world with less effort than it took RESIST to move from Summer Street to Elm Street, are not taking any democratic nonsense from the voters lying down. As Kissinger noted in the Chilean context in 1973, sometimes the people just have to be protected against their own foolishness.

These are days then when everyone here in the United States who considers herself or himself progressive must help broadcast to the rest of the world that this country does not exclusively consist of globalized-economy “Anglo-Saxons” and that we haven’t swallowed the story that the welfare state in Europe just “doesn’t work.”

I feel certain that a majority in this country (even if right now they may not even bother to vote) feels like that French union man, and that they do not want to live “like Anglo-Saxons.”

I think the times ask for a new call, a call to resist corporate ruthlessness and asocial greed.

Hans Koning is a Resist board member and writer. His new novel, Pursuit of a Woman on the Hinge of History, will be published this fall by Brookline Books.
Movement Building for Colombia
Grassroots Activists in Madison Kick Off Organizing Drive

JOHN FOURNELLE

"Colombia has been the leading recipient of U.S. military support and training in the hemisphere in the 1990s, now increasing still further. The pretext is the drug war... The aid in fact goes to military forces that have compiled the worst human rights record in the hemisphere, and are closely linked to paramilitary terrorists and drug lords. Information about the matter is voluminous, and shocking, but little of it reaches the general public, who would be appalled if they knew."

So spoke Noam Chomsky, who was a keynote speaker at the Faceless Justice and Colombia Human Rights Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, this past spring. More than 100 people from 15 cities throughout the Midwest and Canada came together to learn about the repressive legal system used against those who criticize Colombia's establishment. Conference attendants learned that in Colombia about two dozen people are murdered or disappeared daily for political reasons. Of the bodies that are identified, the state and its agents are responsible for nearly 70 percent of the murders.

The Colombian military (with thousands of soldiers piped through the School of the Americas based in Americus, Georgia) was intensely indoctrinated in the Cold War mentality by U.S. counterinsurgency trainers, and today is a key stumbling block to peace in Colombia. Several insurgent groups continue to wage armed conflict, and numerous efforts for negotiated peace and re-integration into nonviolent political process have been sabotaged continuously by the Colombian military.

The March 1997 conference was organized by the Colombia Support Network (CSN), a Wisconsin grassroots group dedicated to educating the people of the U.S. about the horrendous human rights situation in Colombia, building support for the peacemakers in Colombia, and pressuring the U.S. government to end its support for the forces of repression in Colombia. A key project of CSN is a sister community project with Apartado, a town in the Uraba region of the northwest, not far from the Darien Gap and Panama. For the past few years this area has suffered intense attacks by paramilitary gunmen organized by regional druglords with support from some businessmen and the Colombian military. CSN has been working with Gloria Cuartas, the mayor of Apartado, to try to rally international pressure and assistance to the region, to defuse some of the violence.

In April 1995 when three assassins were detailed to murder Gloria, CSN created a "Gloria Cuartas Web Page" on its web site (www.igc.apc.org/csn) and issued an alert via internet, fax and phone. The alerts generated pressure on the U.S. embassy in Bogota. Gloria has stated that the international pressure created by the web page plus support from UNESCO saved her life. People all over the U.S. demanded that the U.S. Ambassador and State Department withhold visas for Colombian military officers implicated in human rights abuses.

The Uraba region, and the adjacent Choco, have been historically frontier regions where political dissidents and others have fled the periodic waves of violence sweeping the country during the Twentieth Century. The Choco was settled by escaped slaves and is heavily Afro-Colombian; indigenous communities are also scattered throughout Uraba and the Choco. This region holds a strategic economic and military position, and with the reversion of the canal in Panama, there is increasing interest in construction of one or more water or combined water-road trans-oceanic canals here. Add to that Colombia's "Plan Pacifico" of economic development (read exploitation) of the mineral and forest resources, plus interest in neoliberal "free trade zones" and it all spells disaster for the traditional inhabitants of these lands. What better excuse to seize the land than to send in paramilitary gunmen, strafing and bombing the areas, "to clean out the..." 

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guerrillas!" The waves of refugees from the Choco flooded into Apartado and nearby Turbo late last year, swelling the numbers of those who fled south to escape the "Mochacabas" (head-choppers) up there.

The horrific violence imparted by the mohacabas has been documented in detail by Fr. Javier Giraldo, SJ, of the Bogota non-governmental organization (NGO) Justicia y Paz. His letters to the Colombian authorities have been translated and posted on CSN's web page with calls for concerned people to write to U.S. and Colombian officials. CSN works with Justicia y Paz and other Colombian NGOs, attempting to get the information translated into English, and into the hands (or onto computer screens) of people in the U.S. CSN translated and helped publish Fr. Giraldo's book, Colombia: The Genocidal Democracy (Common Courage Press).

An important CSN project is a 48-page quarterly magazine, Colombia Bulletin, which gives an in-depth coverage to the human rights situation. The publication also provides background information about Colombia to counter the simplistic viewpoint put out by the mass media that the problem with Colombia is drugs.

CSN's March 1997 Faceless Justice Conference showed that there is a basis for building a grassroots movement to aid Colombia. Participants decided to organize broadly, mainly throughout the Midwest. A second conference is scheduled in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, September 27-28 and will include participants from all over the U.S., Canada and Mexico. These activists want to come back together and incorporate many other activists and concerned individuals. The goal of the meeting will be to build local projects involving their religious bodies, student groups, unions, etc., in activities supporting peace and justice in Colombia. CSN hopes to see at least a half dozen other US-Colombia sister community projects develop over the next year, as a result of the conference.

John Fournelle grew up in Colombia and is member of the Colombia Support Network. CSN received a grant from Resist in 1997. For more information about CSN or the conference, contact CSN, P.O. Box 1505, Madison WI 53701 (608) 257-8753; csn@igc.apc.org.

The Hong Kong situation is not only an issue used by the U.S. media to exacerbate anti-Chinese feelings. There has been a continuous hullabaloo about the failure of the Chinese government to curb the manufacture and sale of pirated tapes and compact disks. But the Chinese know well that however callous they may appear toward supporting artistic creativity, the real economic action lies in bio-technology, especially in food and medicines, which moves the issue from entertainment to life necessities. They also know full well that they cannot compete successfully in these areas, and that their peoples will not be able to afford the patented fruits hawked by biotech firms.

Much has also been made of Chinese arms sales, supposed restrictions on religious expression, sabre-rattling about Taiwan on occasion, trade restrictions, and more. On most of these issues the Chinese voice has not been heard, but certainly deserves a hearing, because moral arguments can be given on their behalf. There are only two issues on which the Chinese side has been well represented in the U.S. media: Tibet and the treatment of dissident patriots like Han Dongfeng, Wei Jingsheng, and Wang Dan. These are also the only two issues on which the Chinese responses—chauvinistic in the former, despotic in the latter, self-serving in both—can easily be seen to be morally indefensible; coincidence?

Future of [Hollow] Democracy

I believe that democracy has a future in Hong Kong, but that is not saying a great deal because it will be a democracy very much like that currently obtained in the U.S.: a hollow democracy, dominated by money, and manipulated by those who have it, or serve those who do. The great majority of Hong Kong proponents of democracy, like Tung Chee-Hwa himself, Joseph Yam, Anson Chan, and others, are well-to-do members of the Hong Kong elite who do not espouse any populist ideas. They appear to have learned a lesson from places like Singapore—a lesson that their Beijing brethren have not mastered—namely, that representative rule by an elite can be at least as effective in controlling an economy and a population as any non-elected one-party dictatorship. In such a rule the elite can simultaneously claim moral as well as political legitimacy for themselves.

This is not to question the personal character or motivation of Hong Kong democrats, but if true democracy means that every person should have a voice in decisions that directly affect their lives, then Hong Kong is a very long way from being a democracy—just as China is—and the U.S. as well.

Henry Rosemont, Jr. is a member of the RESIST Board. For references for the materials contained herein write him at St. Mary's College of Maryland, St. Mary's City, MD 20686.

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We'd like you to consider becoming a RESIST Pledge.

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GRANTS

Mid-Year Report (January-June 1997)

**Africa/Asia/International ($2,000)**
- Committee on Philippine Issues (Skokie, IL) $1,000
- PINTIG Cultural Group (Chicago, IL) $1,000

**Central, Latin America and the Caribbean ($3,300)**
- Committee on U.S.-Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) (Ithaca, NY) $1,000
- Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico (Washington, DC) $300
- South North Communication Network (San Francisco, CA) $1,000
- Voices for Haiti (Washington, DC) $1,000

**Community Organizing/Anti-Racism ($3,900)**
- Carolina Interfaith Task Force on Central America (Raleigh, NC) $1,000
- Contact Center (Cincinnati, OH) $1,000
- Maryland United for Peace and Justice (Bowie, MD) $700
- Olympia Political Cultural Center (Olympia, WA) $1,000
- South Carolina Burned Church Restoration Committee (Columbia, SC) $200*

**Economic Justice ($5,100)**
- Brooklyn Greenbacks Local Currency Project (Brooklyn, NY) $100
- Compas de La Primavera ( Wentworth, NH) $1,000
- New Hampshire Peace Action Education Fund (Concord, NH) $1,000
- Solutions to End Poverty Soon (STEPS) (Trenton, NJ) $1,000
- Tri-County Advocacy Council ( Havre, MT) $1,000 (Frieda Friedman Saltzman Memorial Endowment Grant)
- Working for Equality and Economic Liberation ( Missoula, MT) $1,000

**Environmental ($5,500)**
- Citizens Against Pesticides (Madison, WI) $500
- Citizens for Safe Water Around Badger (Merrimac, WI) $1,000
- Grassroots Environmental Organization, Inc. ( Flanders, NJ) $1,000
- Regional Alliance for Progressive Policy (Salinas, CA) $1,000

**Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual ($3,400)**
- Bromfield Street Educational Foundation (Boston, MA) $1,000
- Free Americans Creating Equal Status of South Dakota (FACES) ( Rapid City, South Dakota) $100
- PRIDE! (Helena, MT) $1,000
- Gay and Lesbian Visibility Alliance (GALVA- nize) (Madison, WI) $300
- Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League-Youth Council (Washington, DC) $1,000

**Health/AIDS/Disability ($1,700)**
- Coalition for Montanans Concerned with Disabilities (Missoula, MT) $200*
- Coalition of Montanans Concerned with Disabilities (Missoula, MT) $1,000
- Mothers From Hell (Eugene, OR) $500

**Immigrant Workers Association/Asociacion de Trabajadores Inmigrantes (New York, NY) $1,000 (Arthur Raymond Cohen Memorial Endowment Grant)**
- Immigrant Workers Resource Center (Boston, MA) $1,000
- Sweatshop Watch (San Francisco, CA) $1,000

**Media/Culture ($1,000)**
- National Radio Project (Portola Valley, CA) $1,000

**Middle East ($1,000)**
- Campaign to Commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the June War (Cambridge, MA) $1,000

**Native American/Native Peoples ($2,000)**
- Dineh Alliance/Sovereign Dineh Nation (Window Rock, AZ) $1,000
- Micmac Release (Presque Isle, ME) $1,000

**Peace/Anti-Militarism ($2,500)**
- Delaware County Pledge of Resistance (Media, PA) $500

**Women ($1,000)**
- Fuerza Unida (San Antonio, TX) $1,000

**Youth ($8,700)**
- Azabache Collective (Brooklyn, NY) $1,000
- C- Beyond (Oakland, CA) $1,000
- Empty the Shelters- Atlanta (Atlanta, GA) $1,000
- Long Island Gay and Lesbian Youth (Bay Shore, NY) $1,000
- Mt. Diablo Peace Center (Walnut Creek, CA) $1,000
- Norfolk Quaker House, Inc. (Norfolk, VA) $700
- Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities (Project YANO) (Encinitas, CA) $1,000
- Rising Generation Represent (Athol, MA) $1,000
- Summer of Unity and Liberation- SOUL (Berkeley, CA) $1,000

**Total Grants:** $49,190
**Total Groups Funded:** 57

**Total Donor Directed Grants (NWTRCC):** $1,145

**Total Grants:** $50,335

*Indicates an Emergency Grant

The figures above represent the results of four of RESIST's eight funding cycles during 1997.