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China's Message to Mr. Ford

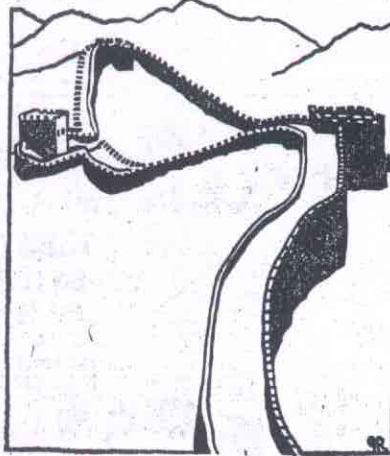
The word from Peking is that it regards Mr. Nixon's talk of a generation of peace as "deceptive nonsense." It calls on the Chinese people to prepare for a war that could come either from Russia or the United States, because "imperialists tend to start wars of aggression suddenly." And it strongly attacks those members of the Chinese leadership who advocate a more far-reaching alliance with the United States.

All these themes, which have appeared sporadically in the Chinese press from time to time, often disguised in allegorical form, have now been brought together in the latest issue of Peking's most authoritative journal, Red Flag. In the past, scattered through a number of lesser publications, such articles suggested that the "radical" opposition was challenging Peking's pro-Western policy which began with Mr. Nixon's visit to China. The form in which they now appear in Red Flag suggest that the debate is coming to a head.

"An economically dependent country," Red Flag says, "cannot be politically independent" and it weaves together the many anti-American strands of recent times into one powerful argument. It draws a lesson for the present from the events of the last century, when imperialism forced China's gate open and turned its leaders into "puppets of international capital." It draws a whole series of implied parallels between the present and the past, when Chinese leaders "plunged into the embrace of imperialism" and insisted on a friendly foreign policy as the "only" possible approach. Red Flag would obviously prefer to keep Peking's options open.

It denounces treaties which "surrendered national rights and brought humiliation to the country"—an allusion to Peking's concession on Taiwan in the joint statement issued during Mr. Nixon's visit to China. Indeed, it explains, they could not have obtained imperialist support if they had not been willing to sell out the country's interests. The "they" of the article are China's pre-revolutionary leaders, but the issues are those of today.

The article drives home a "negative lesson" to be learned from the conduct of an official once "in charge of for-



By Patricia Roberts

eign affairs—an allusion, the context suggests, to Premier Chou En-Lai. His political links with foreign countries had led him into "military" as well as "economic" involvements. He had "bought foreign rifles and cannon" and had "begged for foreign capital." The article warned against the "wholesale Westernization" of China which could result from such policies, and against falling prey to the foreigners' design of "using Chinese to control China."

The Red Flag article is addressed not only by one Peking faction to another, but also by Peking to Washington. It tells the United States that Peking is so suspicious of U.S. motives that it might call off the deal which it began to negotiate with Mr. Nixon—unless Washington gives better evidence of good faith than it has provided so far.

The message is obviously intended for Mr. Kissinger—and, through him, for Mr. Ford. Dr. Kissinger can no longer ignore the linkage between Peking's domestic and foreign policy debate. When the linkage was demonstrated in this column a year ago, Dr. Kissinger was asked by Sen. J. W. Fulbright during Foreign Relations Committee hearings to comment on the article. He replied that the Peking debate was concerned only with domestic issues and that, anyway, it was over. Academic experts as well as those of the CIA, whose opinion he sought,

have since repeatedly confirmed this view—but some of them are now beginning to have second thoughts. They now accept that the Peking debate is concerned with the most fundamental issue of national policy—whether China should be rapidly modernized with foreign aid or drag herself up by her own bootstraps, slowly and painfully. There are great dangers either way.

Gradual modernization might preserve the peasant society so dear to Mao's heart, but it would leave China too weak to stand up to the pressures of a technologically advanced world. Rapid modernization, on the other hand, would inevitably link China to the outside world in a thousand different ways. It would indeed make China dependent on other countries, in the way that all countries are now becoming dependent on others, for better or for worse.

Washington is in a position to influence the course of the Peking debate by making clear its benevolent interest in its outcome—not by words but by actions, political as much as economic, which would help China over the hump. This is Peking's real message to Mr. Ford, in spite of the apparently critical attitude toward the United States implied in the Red Flag article. Peking, or at least a powerful political faction there, wants to do business with Washington—if the terms are right. Now that the reality of the Peking debate is at last beginning to be recognized in Washington, there is at least a chance that the right terms might be found.

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