

In Chinese Schools, It's Back to the Bourgeois Three R's--

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BY PHILLIS W. CHENG

As the accompanying article indicates, China's new leaders believe that their country's future economic progress depends to a large extent on the restoration of order and meritocracy in education.

Formal, Western-style schooling was all but destroyed during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. But if my own recent tour of six Chinese cities is any indication, the country is now in the grip of a sweeping educational counterrevolution. Late last month, for example, Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping, who is generally regarded as the architect of this process, opened a national conference on education by quoting Mao's dictum that "Education must serve the proletariat culture and unite with labor."

But having paid that obeisance to the ideological past, Teng went on to outline a four-point program of moderate reforms:

—Altering the content of academic instruction on all levels, so that less time is spent on revolutionary ideology and more on such traditional subjects as science and literature;

—Establishing as the nation's educational goal the production of graduates who can participate productively in the modernization of science, agriculture, industry and national defense;

—Stressing the role of individual students and workers by inculcating them with a love of diligent study and physical labor and making their admission to universities and assignment to jobs dependent on examination results;

—Professionalizing teaching and rewarding deserving teachers with memberships in the Communist Party and salary increases.

The fruits of this program are already evident not

only on the university level, but also in primary and secondary schools. For example, in Peking's No. 1 Middle School—a secondary school which I visited—students are now assigned to advanced, intermediate and slow classes. Talented students are advanced quickly, while experienced teachers take charge of slow learners, so that their progress may be ensured as well.

Spokesmen for the school's governing Party Committee claimed that the process has increased individual achievement at all levels, improved teaching methods and stimulated extracurricular science projects—a high priority in China's new order. Outstanding students are given formal recognition, while their slower classmates are not discriminated against in the awarding of mem-

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berships in the Red Guard and Youth League, important steps in the lives of young Chinese.

On the primary school level, I noticed that competition is the order of the day. In Peking and Nanking such institutions now display colorful progress charts, marking each student's achievement level. Nanking Education Bureau officials said that many primary students have participated in oral competitions in which youngsters were required to answer 140 arithmetic problems in eight minutes.

To encourage students to concentrate on their studies, the yearly period of required labor in the countryside—a centerpiece of Maoist educational policy—has been reduced from several months to two to four weeks. Moreover, according to Lui Si-yao, minister of educa-

tion, the labor requirement will be waived entirely in 20 key schools for gifted pupils.

On the university level, admissions are now based on the results of one of two separate national examinations—science-engineering or liberal arts. The former tests applicants on their knowledge of physics, chemistry, mathematics, foreign language, Chinese and political science, while the liberal-arts exam tests students' mastery of history, geography, foreign language, Chinese and political science.

Whereas practical job training was a prerequisite to university entrance during the Cultural Revolution, the new admissions policy requires that applicants be high-school graduates under 26 with a "good sense of manual labor." The only political requirement is that applicants support the Communist Party and socialism.

Previous restrictions on class background have been deleted, though authorities claim that applicants from worker and peasant classes still receive high priority. Since the easing of such restrictions, more than 5.7 million applicants have taken the university exams. In Peking alone, 160,000 were tested for the 6,000 spots. Indeed, Peking University officials expect their enrollment to climb from the present 6,000 to 20,000 within five years.

The educational reforms of the Cultural Revolution represented a dramatic and truly radical attempt to expand the social egalitarianism that is the professed goal of Chinese Communism. The result was chaos and intellectual stagnation.

Now, China's leaders have elected to give efficiency and meritocracy a whirl. Apparently the new regime has decided that whatever the risks posed by these "bourgeois" values, the prospect of making China at last a modern nation is worth the ideological gamble.

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