

BOOKS

CHINA: ALIVE IN THE BITTER SEA

by Fox Butterfield

(Times Books; xii+468 pp.; \$19.95)

CHINA WINTER: WORKERS, MANDARINS AND THE PURGE OF THE GANG OF FOUR

by Edoarda Masi

(E. P. Dutton; xi+369 pp.; \$19.95)

James V. Feinerman

As Peking Bureau chief for the *New York Times* in 1979 and 1980, Fox Butterfield—trained at Harvard in John K. Fairbank's China program and veteran of several other Asian bureaux of the *Times*—was in a unique position to provide his readers with daily glimpses of a country closed to them for over a quarter-century. Having set out ten years earlier to become the *Times* correspondent in Peking, Butterfield initially saw his appointment as the culmination of his dreams. By the time he had finished the manuscript for this book, however, he had become disillusioned with China.

Butterfield's picture of the People's Republic today is an important advance over the naive, propaganda-distorted reports from economists, B-movie actresses, and other pundits who made brief trips to China during the period between President Nixon's opening to China and the normalization of relations. In contrast to his American predecessors of the past decade, Butterfield has an excellent command of Chinese. He spent long months exploring Chinese society, seeking to flesh out information from official sources. Since China is a closed society and, as Butterfield says in his introduction, a "police state," this was no easy matter. His persistence paid off, and a wide number of unofficial sources provided him with details of the grim horrors of the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." A number also made it clear to him that the pattern of official abuse of power by no means had ended with the restoration of Deng Xiaoping and the purge of the Gang of Four. Workers, children of high officials, and Communist party members recounted tale after tale of corruption, nepotism, abuse of power, and oppression. He is

able to detail the inept supervision of public construction leading to apartment complexes without indoor plumbing, steel mills that consume an entire province's electricity production, and cost overruns in excess of \$10 billion on new projects to modernize China's iron and steel industry.

Butterfield's book is offered only partly to set the record straight. The reader quickly senses from his strident tone that China's failure to live up to its stated ideals is a personal affront to him. As part of the generation of stu-

dents trained during the Vietnam war, Butterfield, it would seem, was predisposed to view the Communist party in China sympathetically, as victim of a misguided U.S. Government antipathy. The U.S. stubbornly opposed Mao (and his presumed clients in Vietnam) out of a blind anticommunism and failed to recognize that a grateful Chinese populace genuinely supported its liberators. In fact, Butterfield's only other extended published work—his contribution while a graduate student to a conference volume on American missionaries in China—reveals this. Describing U.S. missionary reaction to Communist guerrillas in the late 1930s, Butterfield argued that missionaries with experience of Chinese Communists in the field overcame their distrust of the "Reds" and came to see them as agrarian reformers, allies in the battle against poverty and oppression of China's downtrodden masses. Having held this position against the onslaught of the American Right, it has been a bitter experience for Butterfield and other interpreters of modern China to discover that all was not rosy during the past thirty years in that country and that even the charges of the likes of

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John Foster Dulles held a grain of truth.

The frustrations of a reporter in China are no doubt also responsible for Butterfield's bitterness. He is followed and his surroundings are bugged; a spy is assigned to work in his office and report on him; communications with the outside world are difficult and slow. Furthermore, his physical appearance alone makes it impossible for him to lose himself in the society he is observing, and the Chinese suspicion of foreigners complicates his job. It is not surprising, then, that Butterfield collects the litany of woes of misfits and dissidents but cannot become familiar with the "average Chinese." It is not for want of trying. Reporting from China places a peculiar burden on the correspondent. He can get only a biased view of society from his available sources. Objectivity means conformity to reality, and in China this reality is withheld. Butterfield tries to make the best of it. Sometimes he succeeds admirably, as in his discussion of life in the countryside. Judiciously, he uses information given him by a girl he calls Lihua, filling it out with statistics available in official publications and the works of academic China specialists. Butterfield, however, is quite careful to qualify this description by noting that he has been based in Beijing and has little firsthand knowledge of conditions in the countryside.

Butterfield's conclusion, on the other hand, shows the pitfalls of making assumptions from limited data. On his departure flight from China, seated next to a student going abroad to study, Butterfield strikes up a conversation that ends (as does the book) with her statement: "If China ever opened its doors, everybody would go. To the United States." The implication is that this young woman speaks for her nation, and she may well express the sentiments of hundreds of thousands of her countrymen who, hardened by years of political turmoil and embittered by China's continuing poverty, want to escape abroad. Yet millions more—by far the vast majority of Chinese—are tied by ancestry, family, and friendships to China and would never think of leaving. Indeed, life outside China would be a frightening prospect for all but a handful of educated, fairly sophisticated Chinese.

Nonetheless, this volume stands against a backdrop of other works as a corrective to ignorance and cant. It may

prove as discomfiting to American intellectuals as was Simon Leys's *Chinese Shadows* to the European.

Masi's book was published in Italy almost four years ago and has only now been translated. Ironically, it may cause more of a stir today, when Western readers have been bombarded with stories of the Cultural Revolution in China and the depredations of those who held power as Mao Zedong's health failed. Edoarda Masi will have none of it, however. She was teaching Italian as a foreign expert in the Shanghai Foreign Languages Institute during 1976-77 and had the opportunity to observe events in China during the critical year in which Mao died and the Gang of Four were deposed by the politically more conservative group led by Deng Xiaoping, now holding power. In her view, the political situation was excellent when she arrived. The country was making great strides in giving workers at all levels real control over their lives, and a happy egalitarianism pervaded Chinese life. Within the year she spent in Shanghai, as she would have it, there was a coup d'état by a small coterie of disgruntled bureaucrats who, furious at the erosion of their privileges and power, sought to reverse the tide of the previous twenty years of Chinese history. She is bitter that they seem to have succeeded.

Edoarda Masi is someone who finds the Italian Communist party unacceptably bourgeois; it is not surprising that the China of the Gang of Four appealed to her. As she lays out her political views, the shock of her defense of a generally discredited period of Chinese history gradually dissipates. Yet surprisingly, as she recounts her personal life in China, her friendships with other foreign teachers, her experiences with Chinese colleagues, and her reactions to the situations confronting a foreigner living under the limitations imposed on Chinese society, her views become quite credible. She is witty and astute, and her political beliefs never cloud her judgments of character. She admits to a fondness for the bourgeois-but-intelligent-and-generous fellow teacher who is assigned caretaking duties for her, and she admits her distaste for another politically correct but dull and lazy teacher in her section. She becomes very attached to the child of two Spanish teachers from Peru but describes quite frankly her manipulative

behavior and vanity. Most important, in a society and at a time when people are drawing up sides over a single issue, she makes fine distinctions. Sympathetic to China's struggle, Masi is ever the European intellectual.

Despite her political leanings, Masi's intelligence and critical acuity are what make this book so valuable. No matter how she comes out on the Gang of Four, her documentation of changes in political rhetoric and public pronouncements during her year in China provides much insight into the abrupt changes that the Chinese are obliged by their government to live with and accept. She shows up for what they are the political study classes that the Chinese use to try to twist meaning out of contradictory policy documents: exercises in obfuscation. On a more basic level she provides several illustrations of how news travels in a closed society, especially where foreigners have access to outside, uncensored information of greater reliability than that offered citizens by the government: Rumors picked up from foreign radio news services will be stoutly denied, only to be proven true in a few days' time. The compromises her Chinese colleagues must make to stay abreast of the ever-changing "line" are painstakingly detailed. In a world where yesterday's heresy is today's gospel, her commitment to truth compels her to persist in pointing out the inconsistencies and lies that are essential to maintaining the illusion of adherence to orthodox Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.

Sympathetic as Masi makes her views, eventually they have to be questioned. She leaves China an unregenerate Maoist, in spite of the best evidence available to Western researchers and the testimony of thousands of Chinese who have spoken to journalists, foreign residents, and visitors. Even allowing for Chairman Mao's famous dictum that "A revolution is not a dinner party," the documented devastation of the period from 1965 to 1976 presents the politically committed believer with the unpalatable alternatives of evading the evidence or admitting the devastation and calling it the price of social change. But this is hardly humanitarian and calls into question the claims the revolution makes for the improvement of the human condition. The smugness of some Chinese intellectual circles, now that their position once again is secure, is not enough to justify Masi's

conviction that their fate during the Cultural Revolution was deserved. It does, however, point out a potential source of friction for the future, one the Chinese would be foolish to ignore.

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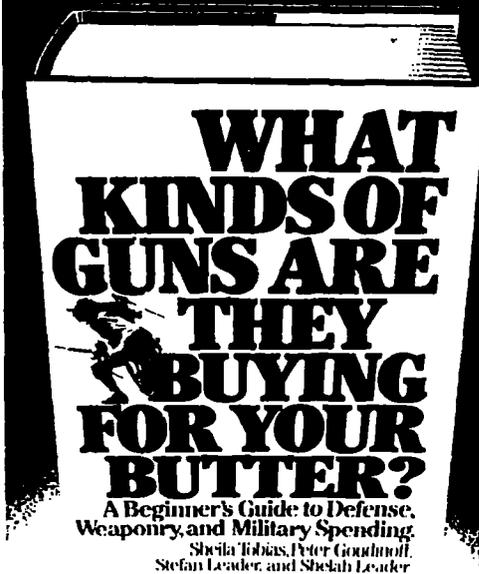
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The succession process in the Soviet Union has begun, although Brezhnev remains in power. Since the Soviet political system lacks regularized mechanisms for choosing new leaders, it is only after an intense period of jockeying for power that a new Party chief—or ruling group—can emerge. Western media tend to focus on the immediate question of a successor to Brezhnev, but whoever that individual is, he will still be part of the Politburo inner circle. The more interesting question is what the whole post-Brezhnev generation of Soviet leaders will look like and how they will rule the USSR when, by the end of the decade, the current gerontocracy has passed away.

These two books, which are based on a thorough examination of Soviet sources, seek to answer the succession question by analyzing the debate within the USSR over the future of Soviet politics. Each focuses on different aspects of the Soviet system and offers a contrasting political assessment. Both address four central issues: What are the main differences between Soviet traditionalists and Soviet modernizers in two core areas: developments within the USSR and East-West relations? To what extent do these public views represent their advocates' genuine convictions? How much influence do these analysts have on Soviet policy-makers? And what are the implications of these contrasting Soviet perceptions for future East-West relations? In sum, should the debate between conserva-

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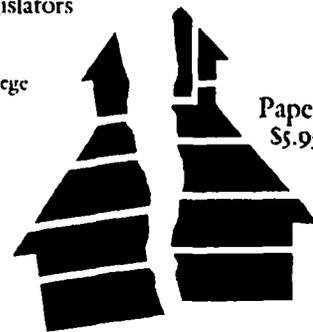
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