INTERNATIONAL NOTES

Early in May, 1975, the United States weekly The Guardian published a major and critical statement on China's foreign policy by Australian journalist, Wilfred Burchett. The article is reprinted here. Burchett is primarily concerned with China’s response to Angola. The fact that he is a known friend of China and has recently spent much time covering events inside Angola adds weight to his views.

About the same time that Burchett’s article was first published the Overseas Press Club of New York awarded its prize for the best book on foreign affairs to Phillip Knightly, another Australian. The book has a lengthy title - “The First Casualty, The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth Maker from the Crimea to Vietnam”. As this indicates, the author examines the role of the war correspondent in the last 120 years and concludes that the “facts” most people read, and from which they understand history, are dubious indeed.

There are honorable exceptions among war correspondents and Knightly names as one of these Wilfred Burchett. Burchett was the first correspondent to describe the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. His report in the Daily Express of September 5, 1945 gave the first graphic descriptions of atomic destruction and made the first references to what is now known as radiation sickness. Not surprisingly, Burchett's story was immediately denied by various United States authorities and he was accused of falling victim to Japanese propaganda.

In later years he was not only accused of falling victim to Chinese, Russian, Korean and Vietnamese propaganda, but various inspired stories have charged him with being an “agent” of these communist governments. Burchett has been subjected to considerable vilification but Knightly’s book adds one more piece of hard evidence that his reports from Korea and Vietnam were generally accurate and that his analysis has been borne out by history. Few war correspondents receive this judgment from Knightly.

This does not mean that Burchett’s opinions on China’s present foreign policy are correct but they should be assessed as coming from a friend of China and raising some very pertinent questions.

China’s current foreign policy has been a subject of broad discussion throughout the world ever since the Angola crisis.

As a person who has written about and defended the Chinese revolution since its inception, I would like to make a few preliminary comments about the Peking government’s present international line.

My starting point is that China has made and does make errors in its foreign policy. No government or policy is capable of being entirely correct all the time.

For instance, one of the severe casualties in the cultural revolution of the late 1960s was Chinese foreign policy. The career - and perhaps even the life - of Foreign Minister Chen Yi was saved by the vigorous defense waged on his behalf by the late Premier Chou En-lai. For a brief period, even Chou was virtually deposed and chaos resulted.

This was the ultra-“left” period now criticised by the Chinese themselves as “making revolution by breaking diplomatic relations” - and it contributed towards China’s isolation. At the same time, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was attacked for even considering peace negotiations with the US. President Ho Chi Minh was reviled at certain public meetings in China for “selling out the south”. Some Vietnamese diplomats were actually physically attacked. Fraternal relations with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and friendly relations with neighbouring, neutral Cambodia were seriously jeopardized during the short reign of these ultra-“leftists”.

The proponents of this erroneous foreign line were afterwards severely punished - and after a long series of personal initiatives by Premier Chou, the damage was repaired.

One of the merits of this period of ultra-“left” domination of foreign policy was that the mistakes were quickly perceived, admitted and corrected. Today, in my view, China is making some serious mistakes and getting deeper and deeper into the mire by trying to defend them.

Many friends of China have been troubled
by what has appeared to them to be Peking's abstention from the international diplomatic and economic boycott of the fascist Pinochet regime in Chile.

This has now been followed by Angola, where China made an error of extreme dimensions. Lack of judgment in favoring the FNLA of Holden Roberto, long after it was recognised (in Peking as elsewhere) that Roberto was a creature of the CIA, has now been compounded by false versions as to what is happening in Angola today. The result is another very serious decline in China's prestige in the African sector of the third world and a general lack of confidence in China's version of what goes on in various parts of the world.

There is no evidence to suggest linking these errors to the current ideological struggles in China, but since one of the consequences of the present internal situation has been to set up a commission at the Communist Party central committee level to investigate rightest errors, many of China's closest supporters would breathe a sigh of relief if this included a review of such errors in the field of foreign policy.

For instance, making aid to national liberation movements or friendship to certain governments conditional on denunciation of "Soviet social-imperialism" is to run the risk of recruiting the opportunist riff-raff of the world. To make such demands would have been correctly qualified by the Chinese leadership a few years ago as inadmissible interference in the internal affairs of a country or organisation. But that such criteria have been offered is an open secret. The Chinese may well argue that their adversaries have done the same for years - but a policy of "only those who denounce our enemies are our friends" is a very poor basis for foreign policy.

Errors, otherwise inexplicable, have occurred as a result. In the summer of 1971, for instance, a top-level delegation of Angola's MPLA was very well received in Peking. It included MPLA president Agostinho Neto and secretary-general Lucio Lara. They explained the situation inside their country and the role of the three independence movements.

Premier Chou and some of his top aides listened attentively as it was explained that UNITA was little more than a Portuguese puppet organization; that the FNLA was a puppet of the CIA. Regarding UNITA, Chou En-lai showed some reserve, but told the MPLA leaders that if they could document their charges appropriate action would be taken. As for the FNLA, Chou En-lai stated: "We know Holden Roberto is a self-declared agent of US imperialism.

The MPLA leaders asked for some military aid, including transport. Military aid was immediately accorded, but - with China's commitment to Indochina - they were advised to seek transport elsewhere. On the last day of their visit, however, word came from Chou En-lai that some transport would also be included in the military aid. Everything seemed fine. But then came increased aid, including military instructors, for Holden Roberto's FNLA.

Absolute proof that UNITA was a tool of Portuguese neo-colonialism was sent to Peking shortly after the anti-fascist coup in Portugal two years ago this April. They came from the PIDE secret police files, directly from one of the leading personalities of the Armed Forces Movement who had good reasons to know of the confidential relations between UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi and the Portuguese High Command in Angola. (Correspondence between Savimbi and top Portuguese military officers proved what the MPLA leadership knew from bitter experience - direct Portuguese-UNITA military cooperation aimed at wiping out the MPLA's armed forces.)

In May 1975, there was another top level MPLA delegation in Peking. By this time Premier Chou En-lai was already hospitalized. The discussions took place with a deputy prime minister (not Teng Hsiao-ping) and a deputy foreign minister - both of whom were present at the meeting four years earlier. They were reminded of Chou En-lai's characterisation of Holden Roberto and asked how it was possible that aid had been intensified when it was public knowledge that this aid was being used in an attempt to exterminate the MPLA. Photographic and other documentary evidence was presented of FNLA atrocities against MPLA supporters in and around Luanda since the Alvor Agreement of January 10, 1975.

There was apparently a cold response to this and a standard reply that the MPLA should abide by the Alvor Agreement, which Portugal had signed with the three movements, providing for a transitional three-party coalition government until independence on Nov. 11, 1975. Patient explanations that the
MPLA had done everything possible to insure the strict implementation of the agreement but that the FNLA-UNITA forces - at the instigation of the US - were simply bent on exterminating them, fell on deaf ears. Through the military instructors China had at Holden Roberto's Kinkuzu base in Zaire, Peking was apparently well informed as to the real role of both President Mobutu and Holden Roberto.

**FNLA AID ENDED**

China stopped aiding the FNLA in 1975 and withdrew its military instructors on the commendable grounds that the aid had been supplied to help Angolans fight Portuguese colonialism but that once independence had been won, no more military aid was necessary and the three movements should get together on the basis of the Alvor Agreement and stop fighting each other. This was the position taken by Chinese diplomats abroad with whom one discussed the matter. In principle it was a just and defensible position. As in Mozambique and elsewhere - notably in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia - Chinese aid had been given to help the peoples of Angola, Mozambique and Indochina in their anti-imperialist, national liberation struggles.

I attended the Alvor Conference and the agreement was a good one, just as was the Paris Agreement to end the war in Vietnam. But it depended on the goodwill and sincerity of all the signatories. The FNLA and UNITA supported to the hilt by the US, behaved exactly like the Thieu regime in South Vietnam and used the Alvor Agreement to step up their attempts to wipe out the MPLA and set themselves up as neo-colonialist puppets. China should have had all the necessary data and Peking's best friends at state and government level in Africa contributed to ensuring that only the MPLA had a truly national, all-Angolan as well as a truly all-African and internationalist position.

China's own experience with the Kuomintang, and over the borders in Korea and the countries of Indochina, should have been sufficient for the leadership to know that agreement between patriots and traitors is impossible. One can try it, as the PRG of South Vietnam sincerely did with the Thieu regime in Saigon and as the MPLA did with the FNLA-UNITA in Angola, even if only to demonstrate to the public who is for national unity and true independence and who is against it. But such an unnatural alliance can never work for long. And the blunt truth is that Chinese arms in FNLA hands were not used against the Portuguese but against the MPLA.

One error leads to another and the Chinese version of events at the recent UN Security Council meeting called to examine the case of South African aggression against Angola is an outstanding example of this. First of all it ran counter to the truth and chronology of events as confirmed by all eyewitness accounts, plus official documentation. Secondly it put China in the unenviable position of at least partly letting racist South Africa off the hook for invading Angola by putting the principal blame on the USSR for "opening the door" to Pretoria's aggression.

Let's briefly review a factual timetable of events in Angola. First, MPLA had been fighting against Portuguese colonialism since the early 1960s. Since The Guardian has so often documented the struggle from this period until the anti-fascist coup in Portugal in 1974 there is no need to recapitulate this period. Suffice to say MPLA was recognised by virtually the entire world as the legitimate national liberation organisation in Angola and had close ties - which it still enjoys today - with the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau, Frelimo in Mozambique and most of the world's liberation organisations and progressive countries. From the early 1960s on, MPLA received Soviet aid and help from the Cubans as well, among others.

Deeply distrustful, for good reason, of the FNLA and UNITA, MPLA agreed in good faith to at least experiment with unity proposals put forward by the Organisation of African Unity following the defeat of Portuguese fascism - leading toward the possibility of a unity government when Angola's independence was to be declared in November 1975.

**SECRET SHIPMENTS**

The ink, quite literally, was not even dry on the Alvor Agreement before the CIA began its secret shipments of arms and money to the FNLA-UNITA neocolonialists. The US government has admitted this. It is simply not true that the Soviet Union destroyed Alvor by immense shipments to one organization. The USSR did ship small quantities of materials to the MPLA as it had been doing for a decade, but the big deliveries didn't occur until quite a bit later in the year when it became
unmistakably evident the FNLA-UNITA were getting massive support from the US, Zaire and South Africa. Then:

March 1975: Troops of the regular Zairese army invaded Angola and established Holden Roberto in nominal power in Carmona (Uije) and other towns of northern Angola.

August 1975: South African troops crossed into Angola from their bases in illegally-occupied South-West Africa (Namibia), setting up bases in Cuangar and Calai.

October 23, 1975: Troops of the regular South African army, supported by one brigade of armored cars and one artillery brigade drive north 1000 miles before being halted by MPLA forces at the Queve river just south of Gabela.

November 7 and 10: Regular troops of the Zaire army, supported by Portuguese mercenaries and spearheaded by South African armored cars drive to within 15 miles of Luanda but were driven back each time - by MPLA troops.

November 10 and 11: The MPLA declares independence and the setting up of the People's Republic of Angola. As an independent and sovereign state, the PRA requests Cuban and Soviet help, in driving back the South African and Zairese troops.

Even the United States has admitted that Soviet arms for the MPLA arrived after Washington was secretly supplying some $32 million worth of military supplies to the FNLA and UNITA forces. To defend the South African invasion as a reaction to Soviet-Cuban "aggression" is to turn facts upside down. And it is equally incorrect and unjust to characterize the Cuban troops - many of whom laid down their lives to prevent a South African-Zairese takeover of Angola - as "mercenaries". It would be just as absurd to describe as "mercenaries" the Chinese People's Volunteers in the Korean War; or the Chinese who fulfilled their international duty in helping the Vietnamese keep their supply lines open - and defended - during the Vietnam war.

It was the Chinese delegation to the 1957 Moscow meeting of world communist parties which correctly insisted on amending a passage in the draft resolution about "revolution not being for export" to insist that counterrevolution was also not for export and that it was the duty of communist parties which held state power to give every help "including that of their armed forces" to support a people which had taken to revolutionary struggle and were the object of counterrevolutionary intervention. People's China, to its credit, upheld this principle in Korea and Vietnam. Cuba, to its credit, upheld this principle of international solidarity in Angola. This is the way history will see it.

China's error in Angola stems from the nature of its struggle with the Soviet Union. It views the USSR as a fascist, capitalist imperialist power bent on world domination, at least equal to if not far worse than the US. Such an analysis can lead one into a policy-making cul-de-sac unless both regional as well as global political considerations are kept in mind and unless all the varying and often contradictory concrete conditions are objectively understood.

Peking's Angola mistake was based upon the assumption that the principal contradiction in the region was between the imperialist interests of both superpowers - with the USSR as the main danger - and to subordinate all else to preventing Moscow from gaining some kind of foothold in Angola through the MPLA. The real contradiction was between the forces of neocolonialism, backed by the US, South Africa and Zaire and the aspirations of the people of Angola - led by the MPLA and backed by virtually all the progressive governments and movements in Africa and throughout the world - for independence, liberation and social progress.

Fear of possible Soviet hegemony in southern Africa - a question I believe the African peoples are perfectly prepared to decide for themselves in their own interests - led China into the impossible position of objectively compromising its support for a liberation struggle and of jeopardizing its considerable prestige among progressive African nations. A logical corollary to seeing superpower contention as everywhere supreme or to view Moscow undialectically is to ultimately conclude that anyone who accepts Soviet aid is suspect and to insist that anything which the USSR does must automatically be condemned.

Fortunately, this criteria was not applied during the Vietnam war and the Vietnamese were able to benefit from both Chinese and Soviet aid and retain the friendship - as MPLA would very much like - of both countries.