

# THE LANCE

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## No News Is Bad News

A couple of items this week--the general mood, and its particular consequences.

You may notice in this week's Lance that there is not much news of what's happening on campus. There is a very simple reason for this. Not much is happening. It seems that this semester has not yet produced much news, or even much gossip. Is this unusual, or is it the same as always? I think it is much the same as it has been in the past, only more so. Several of our traditions are growing weaker, and several are already dead.

I don't mean to be cynical, but it seems that the very cohesiveness that has marked the S. A. community in the past is not as strong this year. Maybe it's not here anymore. I may be wrong about this, and I hope I am. If not, it seems bad times are ahead for us.

One consequence of what I'm talking about has to do with last week's conference for C&C 402 on Urbanization. The attendance at these meetings, even among seniors, was especially poor, which is unfortunate, since two of the speakers were quite good, and worth going to see even if urbanization is not one of your major concerns.

Other examples come to mind rather easily. Student government, athletics, and other speaker events all suffer from a lack of interest and participation. Career Day last week was somewhat more successful than it had been last year, but the alumni who came to help students with what should be a major area of concern--jobs--went largely unnoticed.

I'm getting as tired of writing about apathy as you must be getting of reading about it. Nevertheless, the problem is there, and if we ignore it, it only will get worse. I don't have any answers for it, if any exist. But we must face up to the problem before it destroys what community we have left.



"I THINK THEY CALL IT 'PEACE WITH HONOR!'"

## Workers Also Seek Consumer Comforts In Chinese Future

by Gordon White

Mr. White recently spent 15 months studying in Hong Kong and China, as a graduate student from Cornell University.

PEKING--DNSI--China, as anyone from Chou En-lai on down will tell you, is still a relatively poor country. However, many visitors are struck by an atmosphere of economic well-being, particularly in the big cities. Department stores are well-stocked with a large variety of goods, and they are crowded with customers. Window shopping during free time is a favorite pastime among the urban Chinese. Stores are open on Sundays, the workers' usual day off.

Ordinary Chinese people, like the average American, are quite interested in material goods and are careful, comparative shoppers. When someone liked a Chinese-style jacket which I wore, there was not any hesitation in asking where I had bought it, and how much it cost. "That dacron jacket will outlast two cotton jackets," one worker told me approvingly.

Miners of the Fushun mines in Liaoning province--one of the largest mines in the world--talked of the material advantages of their present life. "When the mines were controlled by the Japanese," said one of the miners, "it was an 'economic crime' even to eat rice. Now we eat well, have comfortable housing and such things as bicycles, radios, sewing-machines and watches."

How does a socialist China meet the demands of its hundreds of millions of consumers? Each year a commercial plan is drawn up in the central Commerce Ministry in Peking. The basic task of this plan is to balance purchasing power with goods available. The latter is determined from the State's agricultural and industrial production plans.

Calculations of national purchasing power are based on the wages of industrial wor-

kers, the salaries of government employees and the cash income of the peasants, who sell their agricultural products to the state.

Even though a comprehensive plan is drawn up only once every 12 months, adjustments are made every quarter. For example, when commodity sources have become greater than purchasing power, commerce departments have three options: to stockpile, to restrain production, or to stimulate demand through cutting prices.

In considering a price cut, political factors are foremost. Take radios for example. The Cultural Revolution brought many more Chinese into closer contact with the mass media. There were obvious political, cultural and economic benefits in increasing the supply of transistor radios. Radio production moreover, had recently increased quite rapidly. The Commerce Bureau was thus able to stimulate demand by cutting prices.

However, according to Sung K'e-ren, an official in the Commerce Ministry's central office, the role of such price changes is limited. "Our main policy," he said, "is to keep prices stable."

If commodity sources are insufficient, commerce departments cannot raise prices at will. They ask industrial bureaus to increase production, or they implement rationing procedures. In China at the moment there is a shortage of cotton, but since cotton cloth is a daily necessity for the people, prices cannot be raised. Rationing was introduced, according to Sung, "to prevent speculators making profits and to make sure that working people have sufficient clothes." He added: "Living standards are not high in China, but basic necessities are met.

Rubber shoes are also considered a basic necessity. When I visited a rubber shoe factory in Hunan province which depended on imported rubber, I was told emphati-

cally that the price of shoes would not go up even if the price of rubber rose on the international market.

In the case of some commodities, putting such political considerations first means that the state loses money. State profits are low on daily necessities, watches and, at least until recently, radios. Necessary commodities include foodstuffs, clothes and drugs.

The price of medicines was slashed by 37 per cent in 1969 as part of a Cultural Revolution movement to increase production of medicines and expand the medical services available to the people, particularly in the countryside. "One injection of penicillin cost the equivalent of 44 catties (about 66 pounds) of flour at the time of Liberation," one commerce official told me, "but now it only costs the equivalent of one catty (about 1 1/2 pounds)." Some pharmaceutical products designed for family planning are distributed free of charge.

Basic economic factors are also taken into account in setting prices--the cost of production, administrative costs and the "profits" which industrial and commercial departments are expected to generate for the state. But, said Sung, the main factor is the political one: "Are prices beneficial to the worker-peasant alliance and do they contribute to equal exchange between agriculture and industry."

Relative prices of industrial and agricultural products are a key factor here. In an interview with the provincial agricultural department of Hupeh, we were told that prices for industrial products for sale in the countryside had been getting lower recently, while prices for agricultural commodities have remained stable or risen. For example, prices of such industrial products as agricultural machinery, chemical fertilizer, kerosene and in-

