China

Robin Munro

The indiscreet thoughts of Academician Fang

Fang Lizhi lost his university job after supporting student demands for democracy. Yet within six months he was able to go on a trip to Rome. Furthermore he met the editor of a 'reactionary' Hong Kong magazine — banned in China — and gave a remarkable interview, reaffirming his belief in democracy, students and intellectuals. Robin Munro sifts through the interview.

In former days, any senior casualty of one of China's periodic bouts of internal purge and political criticism fortunate enough to have avoided banishment to the countryside (or worse) would almost certainly have had the decency or good sense to fade obligingly from view, in hopeful expectation of some degree of eventual rehabilitation by the authorities. Leading astrophysicist Fang Lizhi (50), however, who earlier this year earned himself the dubious title of 'China's Sakharov' after his outspoken support for last winter's student demonstrations in favour of greater democracy, has proven to be no such respecter of political decorum. For during a visit to Rome in mid-June to attend a scientific conference, Fang granted a lengthy surprise interview to Wen Hui, chief editor of the prominent Hong Kong left-wing magazine *Zheng Ming*, in which he bravely reiterated many of the heterodox viewpoints which had landed him in trouble in the first place — and more besides. The choice of *Zheng Ming* as his forum for breaking a six-month period of personal silence, during which he had been vilified throughout the Chinese media as an arch-'bourgeois liberal', makes all the more controversial this devil-may-care reaffirmation of his commitment to Chinese democracy and human rights; the magazine is banned in China, and was only recently denounced in a Central Committee document for 'viciously attacking socialism'.

Few people outside China had even heard of Fang Lizhi until the sudden flare-up of campus unrest last December. The spectacular student demonstration movement, which centred on Shanghai and Beijing but extended to a large number of provincial capitals as well, was in the main a spontaneous and peaceful student protest against the recent resurgence of leftist-style opposition within the Chinese leadership towards key aspects of the Deng Xiaoping reforms. However, the politically conservative and ideologically orthodox Party elders who had been mounting that opposition (several of whom had some years previously been coaxed into semi-retirement by Deng), soon managed to exploit to their own advantage the students' provocative street-level actions; raising the spectre of renewed Cultural Revolution-style chaos and anarchy, they launched a blistering nationwide campaign against so-called 'bourgeois liberalisation' — as a means both of restoring social discipline and of advancing their own policy goals.

Fang Lizhi, Vice-Chancellor of the Science and Technology University of Hefei (Anhui Province, Eastern China) where the first large-scale demonstrations had occurred, was soon thrust into the limelight as the new campaign's inaugural victim. Swiftly, he was joined in official disgrace by the popular but anti-establishment literary figure Wang Ruowang, and by the widely respected champion of *exposé* journalism, Liu Binyan. All three were expelled from the Communist Party, and Fang was transferred from his university leadership post to a senior, though less socially influential, research post in Beijing (see *Index on Censorship*, 3 and 7/1987). But the political implications of this leftist backlash — so reminiscent of the strident 1983 campaign against 'spiritual pollution' from the West — reached all the way to the top, as became clear when in mid-January Hu Yaobang, the Party's General Secretary and hitherto Deng's most favoured disciple, was abruptly forced from office on charges of having been too soft on 'bourgeois liberalisation' (a term signifying over-enthusiasm for Western political values and ideas).

For the first few months of 1987, the sheer vehemence and confidence of this leftist reaction carried all before it, and it appeared as if the now eight-year-old programme of reforms constituting Deng's 'second revolution' (the inspiration, incidentally, for much of Soviet leader Gorbachev's celebrated policy of *glasnost*) might somehow have begun to engender its own Thermidor. However, after a lengthy interim period of support for the general aims of the anti-liberalisation campaign, Deng himself eventually intervened firmly on the side of the reformers — once the campaign's initial goal of restoring the nation's socialist purity had clearly been exceeded, and the leftists' 'hidden agenda' of dissatisfaction with reform itself had become more apparent. From late May onwards, backed by statements from Deng and spearheaded by acting general-secretary Zhao Ziyang, a spectacular reformist comeback was mounted, and the political initiative in the run-up to the Party's key 13th Congress in October had, by mid-summer, slipped once more out of the grasp of the conservatives and the leftists.

The main reason, of course, for the striking recurrence recently of the kind of political shifts and upheavals which were endemic in China prior to the relative stability and consensus of the 1980s, lies in the simple fact of Deng Xiaoping's impending retirement from the 'front line' of leadership. While conflicts have surfaced (as in the 1983 'spiritual pollution' fiasco), the succession struggle is now being openly waged, and the stakes for all concerned are probably higher than at any time since the death of

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Mao. A central element of Deng's own strategy for ensuring the long-term continuity of his economic and social reforms is his plan — first raised in 1980 but as yet hardly begun — to carry out a reform of China's political structure as well. The main thrust here is towards stabilising and rationalising the system of power-tenure and decision-making, in particular by achieving a separation between Party and state. But Deng has also called, more generally, for a democratic reformation of society at large, and it was on this level — last winter — that China's students entered the picture, seeking to extend the wider social dimensions of Dengist 'political reform' in the direction of free elections, freedom of speech and greater respect for human rights.

So where specifically did Fang Lizhi and his student supporters transgress the boundaries of the official view of democracy? Essentially, they challenged the first of Deng's 'four cardinal principles': namely, that the Party must retain control over all aspects of public life. This principle poses the question which has confronted all unofficial advocates of democratic reform in China, from the ill-fated Democracy Movement of the late 1970s onwards. For how can real democracy be achieved, if the Party will not surrender any control?

Fang Lizhi's answer, given in a speech delivered at Shanghai's Jiaotong University last November, only days before the first of the student demonstrations, was disarmingly simple and direct: 'We should not place our hope on grants from the top leadership. Democracy granted from above is not democracy in a real sense. It is relaxation of control.' And he added, in what reads in retrospect like something of a call to arms: 'The intellectuals should demonstrate the strength which they possess ... We have strength. But the question remains whether we dare to use it.' In other words, since the official circle on democracy could not be squared, it would have to be broken.

To express such an incautiously militant view was perhaps risky enough even in the unprecedentedly tolerant and liberal atmosphere, encouraged by Hu Yaobang, of last year's official debate on political reform. And China's students certainly took the advice literally. But that Fang should have restated his ideas so forthrightly in the recent interview with *Zheng Ming* (July 1987), when the leftist cacophony of the campaign against 'bourgeois liberalisation' had only just abated, is remarkable. Perhaps Fang was gambling on the likely success of the reformers at the 13th Congress this autumn; but he had already been publicly denounced and disowned by all sections of the Chinese leadership — and any protection which his new-found status as an internationally known figure might afford him can thus hardly be very secure or reliable.

Ardent democrat

Fang quite naturally wishes to avoid being pushed out on to the tightrope of formal 'dissidence'. As he observed to *Zheng Ming*: 'I do not want to be Sakharov — he is isolated and his situation is different from mine.' Judging from his remarks as a whole, however, he seems already to be half-way up the ladder to the tightrope. Of the officially-condemned student demonstrations (though adding that he initially advised his students against taking to the streets), Fang said: 'It is wrong to negate the impact of the recent student movement. The student movement was striving to achieve democracy by democratic means ... It was certainly not bourgeois liberalisation, which refers to activities that are anti-Party and anti-socialist ... The students had good motives, they supported the reforms and their actions conformed to the Constitution ... Everything they did was legal.' Fang is clearly an ardent democrat and a man of great integrity, and he probably speaks for a sizeable section of the progressive intelligentsia. But it is nonetheless very striking and significant that a prominent representative of what was — until quite recently — China's most oft-persecuted social stratum (the 'stinking ninth category', as the intellectuals used to be called) should have risked identifying himself so unequivocally in this way with the student demonstrators — those zealots and firebrands of the Dengist bandwagon whom Deng had no less firmly disowned.

Fang also rejected the view that the demonstrations, though morally justified, had in practice been counter-productive. For the recent leftist offensive which swept Hu Yaobang from office had evidently badly backfired: 'Everyone can see now that all the various factions — the left, the centre and the right — feel that what happened was a mistake... Anyone with the slightest conservative sense knows that (the campaign) has destroyed the conservatives' prestige, and that their reputation is now in tatters.' More positively still, in Fang's opinion, the shock effect of the campaign had awakened both students and Party reformers alike to harsh reality, dispelling the excessive liberal optimism of the previous summer. Above all: 'It helped toughen the determination of those in the reform faction to carry out political

Professor Fang Lizhi — a biographical note

Fang Lizhi was born in 1936 in Hanzhou, eastern China, the son of a railway worker. He studied physics at Beijing University and was an assistant researcher at the Science Academy. In 1957, during the 'Anti-Rightist' campaign he was expelled from the Communist Party. His wife Li Shuxian, another scientist, was labelled a 'rightist' and also expelled from the Party. Between 1957 and 1968, he was a researcher in solid-state energy spectrum and fundamental particle physics at the University of Science and Technology in Beijing.

In 1968, during the Cultural Revolution', Fang Lizhi was turned over to the 'Agency of Proletarian Dictatorship' for 'reprogramming'. At that time he turned his attention to the theory of relativity and cosmology. In 1973 he returned to the University of Science and Technology, which was moved from Beijing to Hefei (Anhui province, eastern China). In 1978 he was 'rehabilitated', readmitted to the Party and made a full professor in Astrophysics. In 1984, Professor Fang Lizhi finally became the Vice-President of the University of Science and Technology at Hefei, after having had his promotion turned down three times by the Party's Central Secretariat.

In February 1987, Professor Fang Lizhi was dismissed from his university and again expelled from the Party when the 'Anti-bourgeois liberalisation' campaign started, mostly on account of his outspoken advocacy of greater democracy and intellectual freedom. He has been allowed to continue with his scientific research in Beijing.

Professor Fang Lizhi has published more than 30 scientific papers in international journals and is recognised as a brilliant scientist. He has attended numerous scientific conferences abroad, notably at Oxford and Princeton. Because of his scientific achievements, his integrity and his commitment to human rights and intellectual freedom, he has won a reputation abroad as the 'Chinese Sakharov'.

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reforms, and it persuaded those who previously had little sense of urgency to realise that such reform is now imperative.'

Certainly, the various signals coming from the top leadership in July and August, as it met in the summer resort of Beidaihe to argue through the agenda and resolutions of the approaching Party Congress, tended to confirm Fang's analysis. Both Zhao and Deng, having regained the initiative, were insisting that the solution to the problems of the day was more reform and greater co-operation with the West, not less. The issue of political reform, which had disappeared from view at the start of 1987, was now set to top the congress agenda, and 'startling personnel changes' were being hinted at — although face-saving formulas on the need for continued vigilance against 'bourgeois liberalisation' can also be expected.

Fang admits, however, that the events of earlier this year have had a chastening effect upon him: 'I no longer have the overly optimistic view of the situation that I used to have.' But perhaps more surprising is the fact that his optimism survived at all. For as he revealed to *Zheng Ming*, he had been expelled from the Party once before, during the Anti-Rightist campaign of 1957 (although, unlike his wife, he escaped the formal 'rightist' label). But equally, it is a telling sign of the extent to which liberalisation really has taken place in recent years that Fang, despite all the attacks against him this year, was none the less able to travel abroad — and also to feel confident enough to grant an interview with a 'reactionary' magazine. Not only this, but during his absence abroad his wife, Li Shuxian, was elected by a large majority to represent Beijing University on the local People's Congress. Such events may well be highly atypical, but they would still have been unthinkable only a few years ago.

Total Westernisation?

What now is the way forward for China, in Fang's view? While firmly favouring reform over revolution, and insisting that true democracy can never be attained by non-democratic means, Fang is certainly no placid gradualist. When questioned, he carefully dissociated himself from the tactics of 'direct confrontation with government' pursued by the now sizeable US-based Chinese dissident organisation 'China Spring', and also from the plan of 'some people abroad' to found a political party — but he is still clearly a man in a hurry. Indeed, the main charge levelled against Fang and other 'bourgeois liberals' earlier this year was that they had called for 'total Westernisation'. This theme relates to what has been the key dilemma for Chinese modernisers over the past century and a half: namely, how is China to absorb the technological and ideological secrets of Western supremacy, without in the process discarding its own cultural and moral superiority? Fang, like the Chinese iconoclasts of the May 4th Movement of 1919, has few scruples on this account, as he showed in a speech at Tongji University last November: 'What kind of modernisation do we want?... As for myself, I think that complete Westernisation is the only way to modernise (enthusiastic applause). I believe in thorough, comprehensive liberalisation, because Chinese culture is primitive, not just backward in any particular respect.'

However, contrary to what his critics have charged, by 'total Westernisation' Fang really meant that China should avoid setting up artificial barriers which would impede the influx of *beneficial* influences from the West. He was not suggesting that the entire social package must be accepted uncritically, and still less — as he wryly put it — that 'even big noses are superior to our own'! Still, one man's beneficial influence is another man's spiritual pollution, and the idea of 'total Westernisation' thus represents far too bitter a pill for the Chinese leadership to swallow. Despite proddings from his questioner, Fang wisely steered clear of the issue during the interview, although on his subsequent return to Beijing he made a point of reaffirming to reporters his belief that 'without democracy, there can be no real modernisation'.

When asked about the role of the intellectuals in China, Fang was careful to assign first importance to the workers and peasants, adding that if the intellectuals were indeed to become a cohesive social force, this would only happen slowly. As he forthrightly explained: 'Some people are extremely afraid of intellectuals integrating with the workers and peasants. If intellectuals went among the masses and tried to create a workers' movement, their fate would be extremely dangerous.' The last general attempt in this direction, by the Democracy Movement of the late 1970s, resulted in several of the movement's leaders — including Wei Jingsheng, Xu Wenli and Wang Xizhe — being jailed for up to 15 years. And the possible linkage between student and worker discontents last winter doubtless came high on the list of government anxieties at that time.

In common with the more radical official reformers, Fang sees great hope for the future of democracy in the economic reforms now underway in China. Interestingly, he likened China's current economic developments to the events of late-18th century Europe which had given rise to the growth of bourgeois democracy: 'I regard the democratisation of society as being an inevitable process — just as occurred in the West, with the emergence of the so-called "third estate". In fact, the aristocratic members of the third estate were actually a group of entrepreneurs. If (in China) a portion of the population can become entrepreneurially and economically independent, then I feel this might play a very significant role.' Like some other of his observations, this cuts both ways, for while identifying an emergent social basis for democracy, it suggests that the path ahead may be a long and slow one.

Though Fang's own compass points West, he draws a whimsical parallel between his own recent plight and that of a famous traveller who once went in the opposite direction: 'Some people have asked me what mistake I committed. I tell them that I committed a kind of Marco Polo error. In Italy, Marco Polo wrote a book called *The Description of the World*, to record what he had seen in the East. But his narration was denounced as wild tales and nobody believed what he said. As for myself, on returning home I merely introduced the ABC of the West into China, giving a record of my impressions and experiences. But people just criticised me for talking rubbish and said "How could such things exist?".' Moreover, on the subject of freedom of speech in general, Fang (in only partly ironic vein) observed that China's citizens had now achieved the freedom *not* to speak: 'During the Cultural Revolution, if

Expulsions

Three more leading Chinese intellectuals were expelled from the Party in August as part of the continuing campaign against 'bourgeois liberals'. They included **Wu Zuguang** (70), a playwright best known as a 'rightist' in the 1950s and an opponent of the 'anti-spiritual pollution' campaign in the early 1980; **Wang Ruoshui**, a Liberal Party theoretician and former deputy editor of the Party's official newspaper *People's Daily;* and **Su Shaozhi** (63), director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.

The front cover of *Zheng Ming* ('Democracy') magazine (Hong Kong), which interviewed Fang Lizhi, and which is banned in China.

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one did not declare one's standpoint on an issue then one would be publicly denounced, so it was obligatory to say something. But now one can refuse to declare where one stands — one can remain silent.' Though he insists that he and other 'keensters' like himself have much to say and that they intend to say it, Fang lays no claim to any superior wisdom or insight: 'To be honest, I still cannot offer any really mature view on how to achieve democracy; so far, I still don't know.'

Fang may not have the answers, but he can see where the problem lies. Max Planck, the German physicist, once said that his quantum theory had only gained acceptance after the old, conservative scientists had all passed away. The underlying principle, said Fang, applies equally well to social realities in China: 'It is very difficult to make the older generation change their point of view. Instead, you have to apply the "Planck effect", and wait until they all die off.' (As a Hong Kong journalist pointed out after reading this, 'Hu Yaobang got the sack when he merely suggested that a few of the old leaders retire!')

At its 13th Congress this autumn, the Chinese Communist Party will attempt to resolve some of the country's problems well in advance of this particular 'final solution'. But whatever the emergent balance of political forces, and whether or not greater democracy ensues, the past experience of dissent in China points strongly to the likelihood of Fang's position becoming increasingly precarious. While Deng Xiaoping and colleagues prepare themselves for the 'Planck effect', Academician Fang must now watch out carefully for the 'Sakharov effect'. ■

Extracts from Fang Lizhi's interview with Zheng Ming ('Democracy') magazine, July 1987, published in Hong Kong.

On democracy and human rights in China:

'When I gave talks, many students handed in brief notes asking the same question: "How can democracy actually be realised?"... I always answered them frankly: For the moment I still cannot offer any specific idea or way to achieve democracy in China. I have simply discovered some of China's problems.

'But I do believe that one must achieve democracy by democratic rather than by non-democratic means. What is obtained by non-democratic means is not democracy. What is bestowed by the authorities is not democracy. I am not sure whether I have mentioned this point before. We must fight for democracy by democratic means — we could simply wait until the whole old generation die or until such programmes as democratic elections finally come true. If you just kill them, the country will later return to the non-democratic road somehow... The core of the concept of democracy lies in human rights, and then follows the method of practising democracy.'

On the Chinese student movement:

'I also agree that it is wrong to negate the current student movement. The current movement is a struggle, fighting for democracy by democratic means. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that students must go on the streets to demonstrate. At the very beginning I advised them not to stage any demonstration. Anyway, their demonstration was legal. The student movement is absolutely not bourgeois liberalisation, which by definition is an anti-party anti-socialist trend. Our students did not mean to oppose the party and socialism, they just held demonstrations! How can they be reproached for opposing the Party and socialism? They staged demonstrations to demand better implementation of the election law. I believe that both their motives and actions were not against the Party and socialism. They had good motives, they supported the reform, and their actions conformed with the Constitution. And as for the case of the Hefei demonstration in particular, they had informed the Public Security Bureau of the demonstration plan in advance. Everything they did was legal.'

On upholding the 'Four Basic Principles'

(adherence to socialism, people's democratic dictatorship, leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought):

'In my speeches I have asked a question: Can what we have been working for in the past 30 years actually be counted as socialism? If your socialism is an ideal system and is accepted by all the people, then I will not oppose it. The point is how to achieve it. Take the four basic principles, or the three and a half basic principles (Mao Zedong Thought is in itself open to question) as an example, what should we do to uphold these principles? Are we going to follow Marxism? The general election system is a part of Marxism. This was a principle pursued by the Paris Commune. I have talked about this issue with my students. What we are now practising is grassroots rather than general elections. We are approaching the goal step by step. But anyway we should approach direct elections, shouldn't we? This is a principle of Marxism. Are you going to uphold it? If so, then you should take action to do it. The crux of the problem is that things that should be upheld, are not upheld. Who has actually failed to do so? Further examples can still be cited.'

On socialism:

'I think the habit of "refusing to admit one's mistakes" that you have mentioned is common to many people. In the West, it is also very hard for some presidents to admit their mistakes. However, in a democratic state, it is guaranteed that mistakes can be corrected in due course. If a president has really committed mistakes, he can be removed from his post. If a political party does not perform well, it can also be replaced by another. Democracy is the key link in this guarantee. Now the key argument is that the socialist principle is still quite all right, and the problem lies in the fact that this principle is not well implemented. Of course, views vary on this argument, and people's interpretations of the term "socialism" are different ...

'In China, people always think of

socialism as an ideal society, a perfect society, where there is no exploitation and unemployment but a very high standard of living. Due to this interpretation, nobody would object to this principle. So the crux of the problem lies in practice. Whether it is possible to practise this principle, or what the result will be if this principle is practised, is another question. Such being the case, can you tell me what is failure? If you debate with them, they may argue: *How can our principle fail? Everybody* agrees with it. You can only say we have not properly implemented the principle, but you cannot complain that the principle is not good.'

On the prospects for reform in China:

'The West had the religious reform advocated by Martin Luther, and the influence of that reform was no less than a revolution. The Renaissance then spread its influence in three aspects, and first was the influence of stepping towards democracy through science. I think this historical and religious reform is no less important than a revolution. We must really understand this religious reform and should not think that reform only means absorbing foreign investment funds. That reform was limited to religion, but its influence resulted in great changes in the concepts and values of the whole society. Reviewing history, I think if we can do a good job in reform, its significance may be just the same as the religious reform conducted here (in Europe) more than 400 years ago. In order to develop science and industry, China must now carry out reform. If we understand reform in such a way, there is significance to it and it may not come to a stop... From a long term historical point of view, only one step can probably be taken in one stage, and particularly in China today.'

On the strength of Chinese intellectuals today:

'I have said that the situation of intellectuals has somewhat improved. Now they can refuse to say anything, but those who see things with a keen eye still want to say something. For example, I am one who wants to say something; so are some other people. Some intellectuals do not say anything, but their thinking is independent. They can now do nothing to politics and the economy, but they will grow into a force in society step by step as the social background changes. Not too many intellectuals in China now engage in business or run enterprises, but I think there will be more and more intellectuals who will do so, and particularly among the younger generation. I have found that they do not look down upon these jobs, and many of them are willing to do them. They will gradually grow into an independent force in the economic field of the country; then, the social background will also change.

'Today, the thinking of intellectuals is independent and they have the freedom to keep silent. Now they can do nothing in the economic field of the country, but they will become every day more independent in public opinion, thinking, and even in the economic field of our country.

'In my opinion, democratising the life of the whole of society is the inevitable course of history. Just as in the West, the so-called third stratum emerged from among the aristocrats who were in fact a group of entrepreneurs. If a group of people become independent in the economic field of our country, they will be considered a significant factor.'

On the 'Anti-Bourgeois Liberalisation' campaign and the dismissal of Hu Yaobang, the Party's general-secretary in January 1987:

'In the past, I was too optimistic about the situation, but now I am not so. A few years ago, I said that the present situation in China had developed to the point that "the East wind is blowing and battle drums are rolling; now, no one is afraid of others", when actually it had not developed to such a point...

'In terms of both the reformers and the conservatives, what has been done to Hu is wrong. We understand that the left, the middle and the right all believe that what has been done is wrong. There are only a few conservatives. Those who have a few conservative ideas have also come to know that the matter has swept every bit of the conservatives into the dust. However, the campaign (against 'bourgeois liberalisation') has played a positive role. It has made students see more clearly the essence of the system and understand that they should not be too optimistic. It has strengthened the determination of the reformers to conduct political reforms. Meanwhile, it has convinced those who were not very active in reform that it is now imperative to carry out reform'.

On life, work and the future:

'As far as my present situation is concerned, to be honest, you cannot say there is no pressure on me. But I myself have felt perhaps less pressure than people abroad have expected...

'The whole of Chinese culture needs to be transformed or, to put it more precisely, be transformed in all respects. Politics is naturally one of the very key links. In some cases, reform in this field can indeed achieve rapid results. But it won't work without preparation. The job I am usually doing at the moment can help to forward democratisation as well — I mean that scientific research can also help to push ahead the process of democratisation. This is a very crucial point. The sciences cannot possibly develop without the Renaissance; democracy and sciences develop side by side parallel to each other.

'One of the most significant examples is the case of Galileo — the development of his views was linked with the prevalent ideology of his time. Galileo's contributions, in terms of the impact of his views on society, were definitely comparable to any one social scientist's contribution to the promotion of democracy... Freedom of academic inquiry is one of the basic conditions for development of the sciences. The efforts to promote sciences are bound to clash with views that oppose freedom of academic inquiry and democracy. But such efforts are essential...

'Some people asked me what mistake I committed. I told them I had committed a Marco Polo-type mistake. In Italy, Marco Polo wrote the book 'Description of the World' to record what he had seen in the East. His narration was denounced as wild tales and nobody believed what he said. In fact, I have merely introduced the ABC of the West into China. It is a record of my own real feelings. But they just criticise me for talking nonsense. Nowadays many people still know nothing about the West but believe that the West remains the same as in Marx's time...

'I do not want to be Sakharov. He is isolated and is different from me. Since I was expelled from the Party, I have received many letters from all directions and from different social strata... I will not live abroad because I am needed by my own land'. ■