



New Zealand China Friendship Society Inc.

Patron: The Hon. Philip Burdon

Website : www.nzchinasociety.org.nz

Christchurch Branch Newsletter

February 2010

Secretary Annette Hill, Phone 322-8182, email: tomnahunurich@xtra.co.nz

Next Meeting

Thursday 25th February 7.30pm

Rewi Alley Education and Cultural Centre, 32 Matipo Street

Gold coin donation (suggest \$2). Bring-&-buy table!

AGM

President's report, financial report, election of officers and committee, followed by general business.

AGM – PLEASE NOTE

We would like some new Committee Members please as some have retired after giving long service to the branch. We meet once a month – usually the first Thursday of the month for one to one and a half hours. Also we do need a new treasurer this year.

Please put your name forward to the Secretary for 2010 and give us the benefit of your wisdom and experience. We'd also welcome help with suppers, the sales table, meeting and greeting – all great ways to make friends with other members!

The AGM will be followed by our speaker for the evening

URSULA HELEM

**She will talk on her trip to China as a member of
The Prominent Persons & Leaders Tour 2009**

**Ursula visited Beijing, Shanxi & Henan Provinces
& Shanghai**

For the past 11 years Ursula has worked for the Rewi Alley School and is also a member of our branch.

Each year 10 people are chosen from around New Zealand to go on the 10 day tour. The five Leaders are members of the NZ China Friendship Society. We try to choose members who have or will be able to give value to the Society. The five Prominent Persons are outside the NZCFS. They can be mayors, journalists, artists etc. The members of the tour pay their airfare to China & the Youxie meet all the internal costs. **This year's tour will be in September.**

**Chinese New Year greetings to you all for the year of the TIGER
and**

I hope you had a good Christmas and Holidays

THE Voice of Friendship:

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN MY EYE

Bill Willmott

On October 1st, 1949, I was a young college student in Ohio, USA, having left China only four months before, and when I read that Mao Zedong had shouted from the Tiananmen rostrum “The Chinese People have stood up!” I shouted the same in my little dormitory room. After the last dark years of the Guomindang regime, the Chinese people, I believed, would now have the chance to build a new China, a socialist China where equality and democracy would flourish instead of exploitation and repression.

In 1932, when I was born in Chengdu, China was a poverty-stricken and chaotic country, “The Poor Man of Asia”, as Western commentators called it. As a child, I experienced a China where the vast majority of the population were impoverished peasants, dressed in rags and doing back-breaking work from dawn to dusk, yet living on the edge of starvation because they were paying exorbitant rents to ruthless landlords.

Just outside our front gate were the fields of such a peasant, whose family lived in a thatched mud hut down to road. They grew a pig, but they could never eat meat--they couldn't even afford to eat rice because the landlord took their entire crop as rent. The workers in the city lived just as miserably, and many terrible diseases wracked all the poor: dysentery, TB, cholera, typhoid, typhus, schistosomiasis. 60 million people died of infectious and paracytic diseases every year.

Cruel warlords controlled most of the country then, collaborating with a corrupt and repressive government whose secret police spied on everyone; progressives were persecuted, imprisoned or shot for speaking out. In the university where my parents taught, some students just disappeared. The government printed money to finance their operations, creating a hyper-inflation that caused misery for the *laobaixin*, the ordinary people.

In those dreadful times, I learned from my father that only the Communist Party had a programme to change China for the better. We rejoiced at the victories of the People's Liberation Army, and I learned to dance the *yangge* with the progressive student groups meeting in our house. My father arranged for a young woman to listen to the broadcast from Yan'an every evening on our short-wave radio to bring news and instructions to the underground revolutionary movement in Chengdu.

During the summer of 1948, I asked two poor peasants on Mt Emei if they had heard of Mao Zedong. “Oh yes,” they replied, “Mao Zhu will come soon with an army to liberate us.” (In their lore, alive since the Long March passed through that region a dozen years before, Mao Zedong and Zhu De had become fused into a single folk hero!). Just before I left Chengdu in July, 1949, I saw Generalissimo and Madam Chiang Kaishek on our university campus. It was obvious that they had lost the civil war and a communist-led victory was imminent.

We looked forward to great changes, and we were not disappointed. Within two years, my parents saw land reform eliminate landlordism, and peasant livelihood grew by leaps and bounds. Then small-scale and larger-scale co-operatives raised living standards and began the socialisation of Chinese society.

China's zigzag road to socialism has seen both set-backs and advances, but the overall progress has been immense. Today, despite enormous problems in every sector of society—economic, social, political and environmental—the life of the Chinese people is immeasurably better than in the China I knew as a child. Every time I visit China, I can see changes for the better. On the Chengdu plain, I have seen peasants turn into farmers and their thatched mud huts replaced by two-storey modern houses. In remote Shandan, where Rewi

Alley built his school on the edge of the Gobi Desert in Gansu, I have seen a poor, dirty, ragged population turn into a well-dressed, well-fed, prosperous community living in modern buildings along broad, clean boulevards. Everywhere in China, I have seen people freed from the yokes of repression, exploitation, and disease. In sixty years the People's Republic of China has wrought huge changes for the better. May its wise leaders find ways to solve both the internal and global problems it faces and continue along the path to a democratic socialist society.

17 August 2009

**Prize Giving was a great success. Many thanks to Di Madgin & her sub – committee for all their work
December 2009 prize winners**



FOR YOUR DIARIES

Lantern Festival 6 - 7 March Victoria Square

Culture Galore, Saturday 13th of March. The city's multi cultural festival of performing arts, ethnic food, crafts, demonstrations, sports, games and language is on again in Ray Blank Park, noon to 4pm. It's a great opportunity to experience and celebrate the diversity of cultures in our community so bring a rug or a chair and make an afternoon of it!

Next Meeting – Thursday 25th March 7.30pm

There is to be a delegation coming from Gansu, China later on in the year.

Garden Tour

**There are still 2 or 3 places on the Garden Tour being lead by Di Madgin & Bill Willmott leaving 16 April 2010 for 15 nights. Cost from Christchurch \$5,798 (very reasonable) Contact the Travel Agent Desmond Kearns (M.N.Z.I.T.T) NZCFS Tour Coordinator Tel: 0800 80 80 25 Email: kemp@hot.co.nz
or Di or Bill for more info 3893559**