



**The Cultural Revolution**  
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## The Cultural Revolution

An Attempt at Interpretation

(May/December 1967)

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From **International Socialist Review**, Vol. 29 No. 4, July–August 1968, pp. 38–64.

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The “cultural revolution” undoubtedly constitutes the most complex phenomenon faced by revolutionary Marxists in recent decades. Because of the scale of the masses set in motion, the social conflicts it has revealed, and its extremely contradictory aspects, it demands a sensitive and painstaking analytical effort on the part of those concerned with discerning its objective meaning. Simplified answers such as “Mao is only another Stalin,” “Mao has started the political revolution,” which derive far more from preconceived schemas than from a scientific analysis of reality, cannot possibly account for the complexity of the

phenomenon. They are, consequently, theoretically sterile and politically debilitating.

The attempt to overcome these difficulties by using historical analogies is understandable. This runs no less risk of falling into serious errors. Of course history is the only laboratory of the social sciences. The history of past revolutions is the only source for formulating the objective laws of current revolutionary convulsions. But references must be chosen with the greatest care so as to separate national *peculiarities* from the *general* characteristics which are common to all revolutions.

It is here that we are confronted by a major difficulty. The concrete course followed by the Russian revolution, particularly after the defeat of the German revolution in 1923, can in no way be considered as typical for all contemporary revolutions.

In any case, Trotsky's contribution, which constitutes the high point up to now in the Marxist analysis of societies in transition from capitalism to socialism, reached this clear conclusion:

“In the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet state it is not the general laws of modern society from capitalism to socialism which find expression *but a special, exceptional and temporary refraction of these laws* under the conditions of a backward revolutionary country in a capitalist environment.” (L. Trotsky: **In Defense of Marxism**, Pioneer Publishers, 1942, p. 7. Emphasis added)

And further on, with even greater precision, Trotsky pointed out that the all-powerful character of the bureaucracy had *two causes*: the backwardness of the country and imperialist encirclement, which will disappear with the victory of the world revolution.

The victory of the world revolution still remains ahead. But the historical period that began with the fall of Mussolini in 1943 and the transformation of the Yugoslav resistance movement into a proletarian revolution obviously marked the progression of the world revolution. Since that time, the major factor carrying it forward was the victory of the Chinese revolution in 1949. Again, according to Trotsky, the immediate link in the chain of causes that brought about the victory of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR was the fact that “the tired and disappointed masses were indifferent to what was happening on the summits.” (L. Trotsky: **The Revolution Betrayed**, p. 105) The historical problem is consequently this: Are the new victorious revolutions in the economically backward countries condemned to follow a course similar to that of Stalinist Russia, or will the international extension of the socialist revolution and the higher degree of political activity by the masses which this inspires constitute a sufficient braking force to prevent a repetition of the Stalinist phenomenon? It is on this point that the “cultural revolution” in China and the political crisis which has been unfolding there during the past eighteen months furnish us with very useful lessons.

### **Achievements and international context of the Chinese revolution**

Before proceeding to an analysis of the “cultural revolution” as such, it will be useful to examine the great historical achievements of the Chinese revolution and the international context in which it has developed in the recent period. Such a summary is indispensable

since it constitutes the objective background against which the political crisis has been unfolding since the end of 1964.

Although the Maoist leadership undoubtedly erred by overestimating the capacity of the peasantry to make sacrifices in order to industrialize the country rapidly, although these errors are at the bottom of the serious setbacks suffered by Chinese agriculture and economy during the 1959–61 period, it appears to be a fact that the correction of these errors permitted a rather rapid rehabilitation of the situation. Of course the Chinese leaders had to slow down the rate of economic growth considerably; there is no longer any question of overtaking Great Britain quickly. But most observers agree that the production of grains is approaching 200 million tons per year, that the production of steel has passed the 15-million-ton mark, and that China can cover its own oil requirements. These three successes are all the more remarkable when compared with the picture of relative stagnation presented by India, let alone such countries as Indonesia or Brazil.

The major success of the Chinese revolution is unquestionably in having very largely solved the problem of food. The rationing introduced after the relative failure of the “great leap forward” made it possible to satisfy the basic needs of the working masses in the sphere of food. For several years now, the abundance of fruits, vegetables and poultry in all the cities has struck foreign visitors. Beggars, barefoot children, men or women dressed in rags, are now rarely seen. They are obviously far from socialism, not to speak of communism (the Maoist leaders, moreover, make no pretentious claims about being on the point of achieving the construction of socialism). But progress is colossal in comparison with India, a victim of endemic famine which has become acute in the past two

years. This progress is closely related to the conquests of the Chinese revolution: the achievement of a unified national market, the radical suppression of speculation in foodstuffs, the reduction in waste and losses that were due to scattered and unproductive use of the social surplus product.

These successes are in part explained by the more favorable international context in which the industrialization of China took place, in contrast to that which characterized the first two decades of industrialization in the USSR. China was not encircled by a hostile world. It did not have to carry out the whole task of “primitive socialist accumulation” by its own unaided efforts. It was not subject to the effects of an almost uninterrupted decline of the world revolution. It was not directly threatened by imperialist aggression, so long as the Soviet nuclear umbrella provided adequate protection under the conditions of a “balance of terror.”

But after the first decade of completely favorable international conditions for the accelerated economic growth of China, toward the end of the 1950s the situation began to change. Paradoxically, the fundamental cause for this change did not lie in a retreat of the world revolution but rather in a new advance, especially in the colonial and semi-colonial areas. This advance – exemplified by the victory of the Cuban revolution and the intensification of the revolutionary struggle in South Vietnam – impelled a gradual reorientation in the whole global strategy of American imperialism. For the latter, the main center of gravity for a confrontation with the anti-capitalist forces shifted from Europe to Latin America and Asia.

The Kremlin, in the face of this change in strategy, and fearing the ever-increasing scale and independence of the new revolutionary forces, gave a sharper turn to its conservative course, under the banners of “peaceful coexistence” and

“economic competition.” The Chinese leaders correctly interpreted this to mean a turn toward a more and more temporizing attitude, if not one of complete betrayal, with regard to the colonial revolution. The October 1962 crisis in the Caribbean and the subsequent escalation of imperialist aggression in Vietnam were to them ample confirmation of the soundness of this evaluation. Hence the Sino-Soviet break, the immediate causes for which were the refusal of the Soviet bureaucracy to give nuclear weapons to China or help it manufacture them, together with an abrupt cessation of economic aid to China.

As a consequence, the task of economic and social development which the Chinese revolution had to carry out was made considerably more difficult. With foreign aid thus suddenly removed, the costs of “primitive accumulation” became the exclusive burden of a still very poor Chinese society. In addition, military costs were considerably increased since a direct confrontation between American imperialism and China now became possible and even probable. But the spread of world revolution – above all the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people, the weight and gains of which have for the time being neutralized defeats such as those in Indonesia and Brazil – is continuing to act in a more favorable direction than was the case in the situation of the USSR during the period 1923-45. Revolutionary enthusiasm is still high, especially among the youth. Nor is there a capitalist encirclement of China, even though the Chinese leaders currently speak of Soviet-American “collusion” against their country.

The deterioration of the international situation for the Chinese revolution during the past seven years is, in the final analysis, due to the Soviet bureaucracy. Because of this, it bears the chief responsibility for the political crisis now raging

in China. The Maoist leaders undoubtedly have their share of responsibility. The ultra-opportunistic policies which they followed in relation to the bourgeois Indonesian government and the Indonesian Communist Party helped to prevent a revolutionary victory in that country, a victory which could have changed Southeast Asia. The sectarianism they have demonstrated on the question of a united front in defense of the Vietnamese revolution has cost them the support of important parties such as the Vietnamese, the Korean, and the Japanese, which were formerly aligned with them. But however serious these errors may be, they cannot obscure the main source of the Chinese crisis: the sabotage of economic aid and the subsequent economic blockade of China by the Soviet bureaucracy; its refusal to arm the People's Liberation Army effectively; its failure to reply adequately to imperialist aggression in Vietnam. Even the rejection of a united front by the Maoist leaders must be examined in the light of the fact that the Kremlin has not up to the present time publicly repeated its determination to defend China in the event of direct American aggression against this country. [1]

### **Tensions within Chinese society**

It would be wrong to consider the main tensions which have come to light in Chinese society during recent years to be due primarily to this change in the international situation. It would be more correct to view these tensions as essentially domestic in origin. They reflect both the achievements of the revolution and the distance still separating it from ultimate goals.



This emerges more clearly if we examine the tension which probably is not the greatest at the moment but which holds the weightiest consequences for the future of the revolution and the country: the tension in social relations in the countryside. Despite the scarcity of source material, it appears certain that a substantial social differentiation has been gradually taking place in the villages of China since the “rectification” of the excesses in the “great leap forward.” The fact alone that the Maoist authors themselves constantly confound the formula “former poor peasants and middle peasants” with the formula “poor and middle peasants” and that an “Association of Poor Peasants” has even emerged are clear evidence to this effect. [2] It appears that this differentiation has operated not only at the village level – where the crops and incomes of the “working teams” based on former “rich peasants households” are substantially greater than those of the teams based on former “poor peasants.” It is also operating interregionally. The people’s communes near big urban centers appear to have specialized in the production of vegetables, fruits, poultry, hogs and cotton, which they are producing to the point of relative abundance, and which are yielding much larger incomes than is the case for the communes which are, properly speaking, grain producers. (**Far Eastern Economic Review**, February 16, 1967.) The insistence in Maoist propaganda on the priority to be accorded to grain production is undoubtedly related to this differentiation.

Closely connected to the new tension between rich and poor peasants is the tension between the peasantry (except for the poorest layers) and the state. In general the price which the peasants receive in exchange for their agricultural products is a very modest one. An important part of the agricultural surplus product is siphoned off for investments in industry. The proportions in this tapping process vary. They had a

tendency to rise without limit during the course of the “great leap forward,” to decrease at the beginning of the 1960s, to increase again in 1964 and to diminish in 1965. It is hardly likely that the peasantry as a whole remains indifferent to these fluctuations, or that it joyfully offers this nationalized ground rent on the altar of socialist construction.

In the cities, we can distinguish three different kinds of social tension. Working class discontent rose slowly, especially after the lean years which succeeded the end of the “great leap forward.” It can be assumed that the Chinese proletariat, out of patriotism and class consciousness, reacted to the Soviet blockade and the extreme difficulties of the years 1959–61 by accepting substantial sacrifices in consumption. But it is hardly likely that this proletariat stoically accepted the wage freeze, which has been in effect since 1959, after the very obvious economic revival in 1963–64, while the real incomes of important peasant and bureaucratic layers increased by leaps and bounds in the same period. The readiness with which the working class responded to the appeals of “economism,” according to avowals of the Maoists themselves, demonstrates that the proletariat felt that the time had become ripe to make economic demands.

The intellectuals had been hungry for freedom of creation, discussion and criticism, a hunger which had revealed itself as far back as the “hundred flowers” episode, and which manifested itself again, even though more prudently, at the beginning of the 1960s, notably through the multiplication of works having an allegorical content.

The tension between the workers and the bureaucracy also became more definite as inequalities in income became increasingly obvious. By a decision of the Council of State, July 18, 1955, a system of graduated wages for all state personnel was instituted, the scale going from one to 26. [3]

To these substantial differences in wages [4] must be added the excessive privileges of the top leaders. The Maoist press has exposed and condemned these – but in a suspiciously belated and one-sided way. For example, here is how it describes the material privileges of Tao Chu, the powerful first secretary of the Communist Party’s South Central Regional Bureau (Canton), one of Mao Tse-tung’s principal lieutenants during the first phase of the “cultural revolution”:

“In order to satisfy his new desire for pleasure, Tao Chu had a great many luxurious town and country houses built at public expense. Not only did he own several residences on an island but also a magnificent country house, which was located near the Tsunghua hot springs. But that was not enough for him. He also had various black houses [No doubt, illegal. – *E.G.*], such as the ‘floating club’ and ‘crystal palace’ ...

“Tao Chu’s requirements for these projects were more exacting than those of emperors of the past. Because Tao Chu crossed the bridge over the Tsunghua hot springs three times, raised his eyebrows three times, and uttered three sentences, a hundred workers had to provide supplementary labor each time for several days. Three million yuan were spent on this bridge alone.

“Tao Chu was also a fan of dancing. In order to set up an ideal place for dancing, he spent four million yuan on building a dance pavillion.” (**Red Rebels of Canton**, No. 3, January 15, 1967.)

We can wager that the workers did not prize this open-handedness very highly – at a time when the people as a whole had to pull in their belts a notch! – even if this was when Tao Chu was still a faithful “comrade in arms” of Mao Tse-tung and a booster of “Mao’s thought” ...

Finally, a conflict between generations, which had been gestating in Chinese society for several years, was also a source of serious tension. The number of students in China with a high-school or university education is now close to 20 million; the number of positions in the entire state sector (economy, state apparatus, army, mass organizations, etc.) available to this group is undoubtedly not greater than five million. Moreover, these positions were in the main occupied by men who are not about to retire because of their age, since most of them were appointed during the 1950–58 period. For the mass of the youth, a professional career seemed blocked, nor did there even seem to be a perspective of finding a position as an industrial worker within a reasonably brief period. Their only future appeared to lie in a return to the land and this perspective was all the less alluring because they had experienced their first taste of urban life. It was hardly difficult, therefore, to incite a feeling of revolt against the bureaucrats [5] in this youth.

## **Differences within the Chinese CP**

These social tensions, together with the international context in which the Chinese revolution has developed, constitute the background of the differences which have progressively broken out inside the leading nucleus, and which have ended by completely blowing up this nucleus during the course of the “great cultural revolution.”

It is not easy to make out the history of these differences. In the first place, the Maoist leadership does not permit any direct information to filter out about the real opinions of its

various adversaries. Under the pretext of not permitting “representatives of the bourgeoisie who have infiltrated into the party” to speak, it systematically smothers their opinions. The tenor of these opinions can be garnered only from the polemics of the partisans of the Mao Tse-tung faction, where these opinions are reflected in a distorted and at times completely falsified way.

Then, too, the various oppositions, with but a few exceptions, are careful to refrain from a frank expression of their own opinions. [6] They are especially careful to avoid attacking the Mao myth, in the creation of which virtually all of them had a hand, and they carry on any polemics solely in cryptic phrases, obliquely, and with innuendoes that make interpretation a dubious affair.

It is possible that new information will change the picture of the various tendencies as we are able to establish it by cross-checking presently available information. However, a general outline of these different tendencies emerges quite clearly from such cross-checking.

First of all came the *Peng Teh Huai tendency*, which had a fairly coherent line as opposed to that of the Central Committee. This was demonstrated at the Lushan Plenum of the Central Committee in the summer of 1959. [7] Marshal Peng Teh Huai came out in opposition to the “great leap forward” and demanded a radical retreat with regard to the excessive goals for industrialization and for the appropriation of the agricultural surplus product. Probably (but this already becomes a matter of speculation), Peng Teh Huai also favored a more conciliatory orientation with regard to the Soviet bureaucracy, mainly in order to obtain a renewal of economic and military aid for China from the Kremlin.

In the debates of the Central Committee at Lushan, all of the present adversaries of Mao seem to have opposed Peng

Teh Huai while at the same time suggesting to Mao that he take over some parts of the Peng program, especially those relating to economic policy. The years 1960, 1961 and 1962 were marked by considerable retreats by the Maoists and by successive concessions to the peasants as well as intellectuals and technicians. During this period, various intellectuals and middle functionaries of the party publicly aired views very close to those of Peng Teh Huai, but in allegorical form. Anecdotes and historical plays were the means used to formulate indirect criticisms – quite transparent to party functionaries and to the literate in general – regarding Mao’s “general line.” This is how *Hai Jui Dismissed from Office* by Wu Han, *Evening Talks at Yenshan* by Teng To, and *Hsieh Yao-huan* by Tien Han came to be written. And as is known, it was the criticism of these works which inaugurated the “cultural revolution,” in its specific sense. Although the Maoist interpretations of these authors are often malicious and excessive – particularly the statement that Wu Han and Teng To wanted to “restore capitalism” – it seems true enough that the intent to criticize Maoist policy obliquely and to defend Peng Teh Huai and his group was definitely present.

[8]

A second oppositional tendency appeared around Peng Chen, mayor of Peking and a powerful member of the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party. This tendency was not opposed to launching the “cultural revolution.” On the contrary, as we learn from a circular which the Central Committee sent to the regional, provincial, municipal and departmental offices of the party, under date of May 16, 1966, and which was published belatedly, it was Peng Chen personally who headed a group of five members charged by the Central Committee to supervise the “cultural revolution.” It was in this role that Peng Chen wrote a report on “the current academic discussion,” which was published February

12, 1966, as an internal Communist Party document. [9] Within this “group of five,” differences appeared between a majority headed by Peng Chen and a minority headed by Kang Sheng. Mao Tse-tung and the majority of the Central Committee (Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping included) supported Kang Sheng against Peng Chen. The report of February 12, 1966, was withdrawn. The campaign against Peng Chen and the whole group in the municipal committee of the Peking Communist Party was unleashed.

What was the real nature of the differences between Peng Chen and the majority of the Central Committee? There is no proof that Peng Chen supported the views of Peng Teh Huai in matters of economic or international policy; his anti-Khrushchevist convictions seem obvious. Rumor even attributes to him the paternity of several of the most virulent article-replies by the Central Committee to the *Open Letter* of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. We can be sure that if Peng Chen had written the slightest item which might support an accusation that he had defended a Khrushchevist rightist line (not to mention the slanderous accusation of his being counter-revolutionary or a partisan of the restoration of capitalism), the Maoist press would have been delighted to quote it.

In fact, the circular of May 16, 1966, regarding Peng Chen’s report of February 12, 1966, is not only byzantine in most of its criticisms but often indulges in the most vulgar sophistry. Thus the Maoist circular reproaches Peng Chen for having written that “the discussion in the press should not be limited to political questions but should fully probe the various academic and theoretical questions,” as well as the following sentence:

“Not only is it necessary to beat the other side politically but also to surpass it and beat it decisively in accordance with

academic and professional criteria as well.”

The authors of the circular draw from this the wild conclusion that Peng Chen is here “violating” the rule according to which every ideological debate is a political debate. It is enough to reread the sentences themselves for which Peng Chen is blamed to see that nothing of the sort is involved. Peng Chen is merely defending an elementary principle of all theoretical discussions, asserted many times by Marx, Engels and Lenin, according to which it is *not enough* to condemn a theory as untrue because it has a reactionary class character, is bourgeois, etc.; it is also necessary to *demonstrate* the erroneous character of this theory within the very framework of the scientific disciplines involved in the polemic, by utilizing the material of these disciplines and by demonstrating that Marxism *combines* a better understanding of this material with a superior method for explaining and organizing it. The best works of Marxist criticism – beginning with the **Theories of Surplus Value** by Marx himself – were born from this real appropriation of the material under criticism. Moreover, Marx explicitly rejected as alien to his method that technique which consists of “refuting” theories on the basis of pre-conceived criteria, without demonstrating their erroneous character on scientific grounds (that is to say, economic, sociological, historical, esthetic, etc.). The statement regarding their class character should complete this demonstration; it



must never be a substitute for it. Peng Chen is in the orthodox Marxist-Leninist tradition here – the Maoists raise against him a schematic, mechanistic and vulgar revision of Marxism.

What remains of the accusations leveled against Peng Chen is consequently the “democratism” and “rotten liberalism” of his organizational ideas, the fact that he dared launch the formula “everyone is equal in face of the truth” – which the Maoists imprudently define as a bourgeois slogan by declaring that there are only “class truths” (as if bourgeois ideology could be true!) – and the fact that he pleaded for respecting minimal norms of proletarian democracy *among the masses*. [10]

The fact that some of the writers and cadres under fire were collaborators of Peng Chen and that he sought to protect them from brutal treatment even though he condemned them politically, probably impelled the mayor of Peking to adopt these positions. But it is also quite possible that he favored a major democratization of the party, state apparatus and military apparatus, and that he was engaged in organizing a tendency on such a platform. [11]

A third oppositional tendency, headed by Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping, apparently made its appearance at the Central Committee Plenum of August 1966. Here the allusions by Maoist commentators to specific differences are more numerous, bearing mainly on agricultural policy. Liu Shao-chi is accused in particular of wanting to increase the size of private plots, to encourage production for the market, to expand the portion of the net product of the communes which is distributed to the peasants at the expense of the portion serving the purposes of accumulation, to set production norms based on the peasant household or work teams, etc.

Some of these accusations are obvious lies and contradict each other. But there is no reason to believe that these differences on the agricultural question are a complete invention. On the contrary, the extreme violence of the public struggle against Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping leads one to believe that the differences are on *fundamental* questions of Communist Party policy. There is no problem in China which is more likely to crystallize violent differences than that involving the attitude toward the peasantry.

The internal logic of the debates on this question during the years 1958-63 leads us to the same conclusions. Liu Shao-chi supported the line of the “great leap forward” along with Mao. More than Mao, however, he became identified with the policy of retreat, once peasant resistance expressed itself in a catastrophic drop in agricultural production. He even replaced Mao as the head of the People’s Republic of China on that occasion. Thanks to this retreat, agricultural production quickly recovered and resumed its advance. After that, the same kind of problem which had already arisen in 1957-58 again became posed in 1965-66: At what rate and in what proportions should the agricultural surplus product be taken from the peasants in order to serve as the funds of accumulation for accelerated industrialization? Undoubtedly the first response of the majority of the Central Committee was to be prudent. The goals of the third plan have not been published, but they hardly seem to have included any new leaps forward” for industrial production. There is no indication of a desire to break records. The “rectification” of the “great leap forward,” which consisted of viewing the development of agriculture as the basis for economic growth, is completely preserved.

But apparatus men like Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping, with their recollections of how close China was to catastrophe

in 1959-61, could detect in the “cultural revolution,” in the campaign to “put politics in command posts in agriculture,” in the trend to consider that any economic problem can be resolved by applying the “thought of Mao Tse-tung,” disquieting signs of a change in course in peasant policy as well. There can be no doubt that the extension of “voluntarist” methods to agriculture, the adoption of ritualistic formulas like “putting public interests before private interests,” were courting the risk of a renewed tension in relations with the peasantry. Indications began to appear that destructive and reactionary methods were being resorted to for agriculture. It is probable that Liu and Teng, during the August 1966 plenum, had urged that the peasants be left outside the “cultural revolution,” which had left them virtually untouched up to that time.

The Maoist faction has accused Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping in addition of misusing the method of “work groups” in the May-July 1966 period. These were groups which the central apparatus of the party sent into the universities and schools, as well as into certain enterprises and administrations, in order to channel and direct the “cultural revolution.” These accusations are generally hysterical and factional in tone; they are also completely contradictory. Liu and Teng are accused simultaneously of having “directed the fire against the revolutionary masses” and of having wanted to “eliminate the great majority of cadres.” [12] It is apparently completely correct that they wanted to preserve a certain number of organizational norms in applying the “cultural revolution”; for instance, the rule of not bringing differences within party committees before the public until the party itself had settled them. In so doing, they probably came into collision with the most critical of the students and showed that they were just as hard as the Maoists, if not more so, toward elements which were

politically suspect on the score of “democratism” and “rotten liberalism.” Finally, although the problem has not yet raised any echoes in the Chinese press, we can suppose that on the question of a united front with the USSR in defense of Vietnam, Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping, as well as Peng Chen and his group, held a more flexible position than Mao. On this score there is rather clear testimony from a Japanese Communist Party delegation which visited China at the beginning of 1966 and negotiated with the leaders of the Chinese CP. According to this testimony, these negotiations failed because of Mao’s insistence on refusing any kind of united action with the Soviet leaders. All the other CCP leaders, including Chou En-lai, would have accepted a joint communique on this occasion in which they would have abstained from the usual virulent attacks against Moscow. Mao was the sole exception. This was the reason for the break between the Japanese CP and the Chinese CP.

The Maoist faction today presents things as if the whole opposition were united from the very beginning and as if Mao had succeeded in cutting it up in accordance with the “salami tactic.” Wu Han and Teng To would allegedly never have dared to go as far as they did if they had not received encouragement from Peng Chen, who would not have entered this struggle without the secret support of Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping. Since Wu Han and Teng To were in fundamental agreement with Peng Teh Huai, there was thus, according to this reasoning, a “bloc,” if not a “conspiracy,” involving Peng Teh Huai, Peng Chen, Liu Shao-chi, and Teng Hsiao-ping. Certain bourgeois commentators maintain a similar interpretation.

Against this hypothesis stands the fact that such a combination would have had the support of a majority of the Political Bureau and the Central Committee, and a majority at

the head of the People's Liberation Army. It is hard to see why such a majority would not have come forward openly in order to save at least Peng Chen, if not Peng Teh Huai. I am of the opinion, therefore, that this view is incorrect. It appears to me, contrary to this, that the Maoist faction is making a deliberate amalgam of some clearly rightist tendencies like that of Peng Teh Huai, a rather "liberalizing" tendency like that of Peng Chen (which is not rightist because of that), and a markedly leftist faction (but more prudent in certain areas than Mao) like that of Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping. [13]

What appears to be accurate, however, is that the plenum of August 1966 lacked the majority needed to condemn Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping; and the famous 16-point resolution issued by this plenum was the result of a compromise which rendered it quite contradictory. We will return to this aspect of the problem when we analyze the contradictions in Maoist ideology. For the moment we want to emphasize the last paragraph of point No.11 of this resolution:

"Criticism of anyone by name in the press should be decided after discussion by the Party committee at the same level, and in some cases submitted to the Party committee at a higher level for approval."

This paragraph undoubtedly explains why the Maoist faction, over a period of several months, never named Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping explicitly in its public attacks against them, using instead only such circumlocutions as, "the first person in a position of authority who, while of the party, has taken the capitalist road." It is also necessary to point out the obvious contradiction between points No. 6 and No. 7 of this resolution, which assert the right of all members of the party and of the people to participate freely in

debates “... with the exception of cases of active counterrevolutionaries where there is clear evidence of crimes such as murder, arson, poisoning, sabotage or theft of state secrets, which should be handled in accordance with the law,” and the last paragraph of point No. 8, which implies that party members exposed as “rightists” will not have the right to speak, even though they have not committed any of the crimes just enumerated:

“The anti-party and anti-socialist rightists must be completely exposed, beaten down, rendered harmless and discredited, and their influence liquidated.” [14]

## **On the “Red Guard” movement**

We have just seen that the differences between Mao and Liu Shao-chi began to emerge during the period extending from May 1966 to the plenum of August 1966. It was during this same period that the Red Guard movement was in preparation, beginning with the launching of the *dazibao* (posters in giant letters) on June 1 at the University of Peking. That was how a movement was unleashed which took on a gigantic mass character – they speak of 20 million Red Guards! It is necessary to establish the social and political scope of this movement as closely as possible.

The objective meaning of the formation of the Red Guards is obvious: When Mao ran into an opposition which this time

included a large part of the party and state cadres, he deliberately appealed over the heads of these cadres to the wide masses. Whether this appeal was simply a maneuver to bolster his power in the party and the state at any cost or whether it expressed his sincere anxiety over the fate of the Chinese revolution which was being threatened by degeneration, is not a very important question so far as determining the *social* meaning of the Red Guard movement is concerned; basically such a question is relevant only to Mao's individual psychological outlook. What is important is that appeals were launched to the masses for action on their part to prevent such degeneration and that the response by these masses not only exceeded Mao Tse-tung's expectations but also swept beyond the objectives which the Maoist faction itself had set for the mobilization.

The faction first addressed itself practically exclusively to the student youth of the high schools and universities. The reasons for this selection are easily understood. To mobilize this youth all that was needed was to close down the schools. Mobilizing the workers on the same scale and for the same period would have meant disorganizing and even halting industrial production. [15] Being less politicalized than the vanguard workers, particularly those who were members of the Communist Party, these youth were easier to indoctrinate in a narrow factional way, and more readily accepted certain accusations against long-standing leaders of the party and the state than would have been the case with the workers, who still retained memories of the history of the Chinese revolution.

Undoubtedly, the determining factor for this choice was the conviction of the Maoists that the student youth was much more likely than the workers to permit a *mass mobilization*, launched on an appeal for revolt against the established

authorities, that is to say against the bureaucracy, *to be channeled toward reform of that bureaucracy rather than its overthrow*. To become aware of this, it is sufficient to look at the precautions taken to prevent the mobilization of Red Guards from exceeding this framework, precautions which show up particularly in the ambiguous attitude of the Maoist faction toward the cadres. [16] What was involved at bottom, therefore, was a *partial mobilization* and not a general mobilization of the masses, a movement which was supposed to exert pressure on the bureaucracy rather than one which was supposed to sweep it out.

These specific traits of the Red Guard movement were not apparent at the beginning to the youth and proletariat of China. All the more so, they escaped the notice of most foreign observers. On the contrary, the movement appeared to be an eruption of elementary forces involving millions of youth, an eruption considered as destructive by some and as constructive by others, depending on their understanding of the current problems confronting the Chinese revolution. Those who believe that this eruption was completely guided and channeled by remote control at every turn of Red Guard activity are greatly deceived. Facts demonstrate Incontestably that there was a very great diversity of opinions, a very wide autonomy in action, a harvest of posters, mimeographed or printed papers, the creation of organizations on the basis of different ideas. Despite the excesses which were committed and the Mao cult in which the whole movement was bathed, this harvest of ideas and experiences undoubtedly constitutes an unprecedented experience for thousands of young Chinese, particularly in comparison with the evolution of the youth in most of the other bureaucratically deformed or degenerated workers states.



Those who advance the hypothesis that the movement was completely guided by remote control solely in the interests of the Maoist faction are unable to furnish a *social explanation* for this mobilization of the youth. The fact that the schools were closed down and free railroad tickets were given out is still insufficient to explain why immense masses of the youth took the road of political action. Many reactionary regimes have tried to mobilize the youth by means of some material advantages and have been unable to get results. And such reactionary movements as succeeded in the past in achieving such a base (the Nazis in Germany, notably), did so less because of material incentives than because of the fact that their demagogy corresponded to the open or hidden needs of specific social layers.

It is in the same sense that Mao Tse-tung's incontestable success in mobilizing the Chinese student youth must be interpreted. The themes on which it was accomplished corresponded to the real preoccupations of a youth in which revolutionary fervor is still very much present, especially because of international developments of the revolution: rebellion against entrenched bureaucratic authority; democracy for the wide masses; egalitarianism; world revolution; struggle against the bourgeoisification of entrenched persons. [17]

As we have tried to show above, these ideological preoccupations correspond with very tangible material interests: The student youth could all the more easily be mobilized against the "authorities" because the latter in large measure barred the road to professional careers for this youth after they finished school.

But if the Maoist faction was not wrong in presuming it possible to bring millions of young people into the factional battle, it was wrong from the outset about its ability to

channel this mobilization continuously on the basis of the absolute primacy given to “Mao Tse-tung’s thought” – a primacy which the various oppositions still in existence do not question in the slightest. Mao Tse-tung became, in a way, the victim of his own legend. He greatly underestimated the explosive nature of the themes injected among the student masses. Above all he underestimated the rapid resurrection of a critical spirit in a vast mass movement, which could not help but thrust thousands of young people on the road toward consciousness regarding the contradictory aspects of Maoist ideology, a consciousness which would wind up in questioning the power of the whole bureaucracy, its Maoist faction included. Above all he underestimated the psychological effect that mobilizing the Red Guards would have on the other factions of the bureaucracy, particularly the powerfully entrenched groups in various regional bureaus.

Seeing that the compromise of August 1966 was being violated, and that point No. 6 of the resolution of August 8, which explicitly provided that debates “should be conducted by reasoning, not by coercion or force,” was not being observed by extremist Maoist groups among the Red Guards, who were beginning to employ the most odious methods of physical and moral pressure against oppositionists [18], the other factions in turn began to appeal to the masses. Since a part of the laboring adult population did not view the incursion of the youth into all spheres of social life, including industrial life, with much sympathy, Mao’s adversaries tried to create a mass base in the working class by making economic concessions to it and urging it to formulate its own demands. Because of this, the Maoist faction in its turn was compelled to extend its mass mobilization to the masses in the plants, the “revolutionary rebels” making their appearance alongside the Red Guards. The sharp crisis of December 1966-January 1967 and the turn it imposed on the

Maoist faction were born from this internal dialectic of the Red Guard movement. Victory was no longer possible through legal party channels nor through the pressure of the Red Guards alone. It therefore became necessary “to seize power” through the intervention of the army, wherever the party committees remained hostile to Mao.

### **The turn of January 1967**

Imperative considerations compelled the Maoist faction to modify its attitude on the Red Guards, to proceed to repression or suppression of its nonconformist left wing, or of its pro-Liu Shao-chi groups. [19] The Red Guard movement was increasingly escaping from its control. A part of the working class was beginning to move independently. There was even a danger that the peasantry would in turn be drawn into the movement. Before the danger of a general flood, the Mao faction tried to reverse matters and reestablish an alliance with a majority section of the bureaucracy. The army intervened in a massive way in order to seal the “triple alliance for seizing power,” which was supposed to unite the “revolutionary organizations” (that is to say, the Maoists), the part of the cadres which the Maoists could win over, and the army leaders. The necessity for calming the people and ending the chaos was one of the main arguments used in the framework of this struggle for “seizing power.” [20]

Many examples can be cited where the Maoist faction lost control over a part of the Red Guard movement, which subsequently acted independently. We will restrict ourselves here to citing the most revealing facts as mentioned by the Maoist press itself. The latter listed the organizations of Red Guards and “revolutionary rebels” which it considers counterrevolutionary, in particular:

- “The Army of Red Guards” and the “Detachment of Worker Militias” in the province of Kweichow. (HNA dispatch published in China but not abroad, February 22, 1967; this dispatch states, moreover, that these organizations are “relatively powerful.”)
- The “Headquarters of the Federation of Revolutionary Rebels among the Workers of Shantung Province” at Tsinan. (HNA dispatch of March 1, 1967, published in Tsinan.)
- The “August First Combat Corps” (also called the “August First Combat Corps for the Thought of Mao Tse-tung”) in Canton. (Denounced in a circular of the provincial military command of Kwantung, dated March 1, 1967.)
- The “United Action Committee of the Red Guards of Peking.” (Denounced in the Peking daily **Shingkangshan** of January 23, 1967.)
- “The Army of the Red Banner” in Harbin (Northeast China), denounced in the

province of Heilungkiang (in **Renmin Ribao** of Peking, March 26, 1967).

- Certain “royalist” organizations, unspecified as to name, in the bicycle plant at Harbin. (HNA dispatch from Harbin, April 11, 1967.)
- The “Preparatory Committee for the Cultural Revolution” in the power plant at Harbin. (**Renmin Ribao**, February 27, 1967.)

These organizations first appear at the level of the enterprise, department, or school, then are almost always established on a local basis and subsequently try to join together on a regional or interregional level. For example, the “August First Combat Corps” in Canton is accused in the military circular cited above of having “defended the ‘Jung Fu Chun’ – a counterrevolutionary organization of the province of Heilungkiang – and of having fabricated slanderous rumors regarding units of the People’s Liberation Army, which they accused of *suppressing* the revolutionary left.”

They even wind up occasionally as national organizations. This clearly emerges from a February 12, 1967, decision of the Council of State and of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party ordering the dissolution of all of these national organizations, “a small number of which were set up by landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements and rightists.”

A Maoist organ, the **Ti-yu Shan-hsien (The Combat Front for Physical Culture)**, lists these national “counter-revolutionary” organizations: “The National Section of the Rebel Corps of the Army for the Elimination of Bourgeois Ideology”; “The National Corps of Red Rebels of the State Farms”; “The General National Rebel Corps of the Red Workers”; “The Chinese Section of the International Army of Red Guards”; etc.

These anti-Maoist groups among the “revolutionary rebels” did not confine themselves to issuing posters and papers considered to be “deviationist.” They also conducted a direct struggle, especially against the repression. The sources mentioned above accuse them of having stormed the prisons at Tsinan, Canton, Peking and Harbin; of having sought to set up an organization of “victims of the repression” at Canton; of having organized a mass demonstration in Peking right in the Square of Celestial Peace; of having taken the **Renmin Ribao** printing plant in Peking by assault.

The case of the “General National Rebel Corps of Red Workers” merits special mention because it is cited by name and dissolved by a decree of the Council of State and of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on February 17, 1967. It apparently involved a national organization of part-time workers and workers without contracts, who had organized a large national mobilization and demonstration at Peking, in order to demand payment of wages due them since 1958, together with a change in their status. These temporary workers are among the least protected groups in the Chinese labor force and for several years the communes have had the habit of “lending” them to industrial enterprises lacking manpower, at famine wages. Their demand is for equalizing their status with the permanently employed. Foreign observers have spoken about

a demonstration in silence which was extremely impressive. The Indian left weekly **Link** tells of several hundred thousand workers arriving in Peking (January 22, 1967).

This example shows that there are at least some specific cases where the Liu Shao-chi faction of the bureaucracy called on proletarian masses in the struggle. For it appears from the decree of February 17, 1967, that the "National Rebel Corps" in question organized this demonstration in close collaboration with the trade-union bureaucrats connected with Liu Shao-chi. The press also mentions a great number of cases where these "anti-party" bureaucrats incited workers to strike: in the state farms (HNA dispatch from Peking, February 21, 1967), particularly in the province of Kiangsu (**Renmin Ribao**, February 19, 1967); in Canton (Canton daily **Kwantung Shan-pao**, February 22, 1967); in a railroad strike at Harbin (HNA dispatch from Peking, March 23, 1967); in a strike of workers in transportation, power and water distribution at Canton (organ of the army at Canton, **Nan-fang Ribao**, March 24, 1967), etc. The accusations are addressed each time against local or regional leaders of the Chinese Communist Party who appear to belong to the Liu Shao-chi faction.

Naturally we must take into account the fact that these accusations may be strictly factional. To incite intervention by the army it was necessary to demonstrate that it was the "authorities" who were creating disorder up to the point of "fomenting strikes." Some of the strikes may have been spontaneous. Those in Shanghai, which in December 1966 to January 1967 were climaxed by a general strike in transportation and very widespread strikes in industry (see particularly the admission contained in the famous "appeal of 11 Shanghai organizations" on January 4, 1967, as printed in **Renmin Ribao** of January 9) were almost assuredly of this

character. [21] It is highly improbable that they were caused by factional adversaries of Mao since the leaders of the municipal committee of the party in Shanghai were loyal Maoists. It was to them that Mao turned in order to initiate the “cultural revolution” from their city, rather than from Peking, which was controlled by the Peng Chen group. Nevertheless, we do believe that there were instances of appeals to the masses by groups of bureaucrats under attack by Mao. Apart from the previously cited case of the temporary workers, the Maoist press cites a great number of examples from which it emerges that leading cadres of the Chinese Communist Party tried to use economic concessions to the worker masses as a means of winning them away from the Mao faction. The virulent campaign “against economism,” unleashed at the beginning of January, 1967, reflects the concern which these attempts inspired in the leaders of the Mao-Lin Piao group. [22]

The meaning of “the triple alliance seizing power” emerges from the factors we have just enumerated. What is involved is repressing the youth and workers who have escaped from the control of the Maoist faction, allaying the fear of the bureaucracy that the “cultural revolution” might be aimed against it as a whole, changing regional leaderships in such a way as to strengthen the positions of the Maoist faction, returning the loyal Red Guard groups to the bosom of orthodoxy, and restoring calm in the factories. To accomplish this, the Maoists went so far as to have the army occupy plants, particularly in Peking. [23] The attacks by Red Guards against the “excesses of ultra-democratism,” against “anarchism,” against the “small group spirit,” which mark the “rectification” campaign of the “cultural revolution,” in full swing since the beginning of 1967, confirm the general meaning of the January turn.



All of this has been accompanied for several months by an intensified campaign first against Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping, then against Liu alone. The outrageous character of this campaign has beyond doubt shocked a large part of the membership of the Chinese Communist Party. It is moreover inevitably turning against Mao Tse-tung himself. [24] But no new acts of physical coercion against the most stubborn opposition leaders have been reported since the terrible scenes in Peking on January 4, 1967, when Peng Chen and others were mistreated and dragged like prisoners before crowds of Red Guards, who shouted insults at them. It is held generally that Chou En-lai forcefully intervened in order to put an end to these excesses and that the Mao-Lin Piao group, needing Chou's support, yielded on this point.

### **“Cultural Revolution” and bureaucratic degeneration**

The meaning of the “cultural revolution” thus emerges from the sequence of events, although the process is far from having come to a conclusion and abrupt turns still are possible.

A conflict within the bureaucracy caused several contending factions to appeal to the masses over the head of the leading party bodies. The Maoist faction first turned to the youth but was later compelled to transfer the struggle to the plants when the opponent factions began to mobilize the workers. On both sides these mobilizations were limited undertakings, their goal being to exert pressure on the party leadership in order to effect a partial change in its composition and political orientation. What was involved was an attempt to reform the

bureaucracy – undoubtedly a radical reform on Mao’s part – but not to abolish it.

But this interbureaucratic struggle liberated enormous revolutionary forces in the youth and proletariat, forces which had been bottled up for a long time. This resulted in spontaneous forms of action and organization among part of the masses. Consequently, at the present stage of development, the relationship of forces between the bureaucracy and the masses has shifted to the advantage of the masses by virtue of a considerable weakening of the bureaucracy. The absence of any large-scale repression after the explosion of January 1967 confirms this evaluation. The faction that wins the struggle will undoubtedly strive to consolidate the power of the bureaucracy. But such stabilization can hardly occur without a rather long period of vicissitudes, both on the domestic and international levels.

Here we find the most striking difference between the evolution of the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death and the evolution in China during the past ten years. Formal analogies between the methods of struggle of Stalin’s apparatus and that of Mao are not lacking. The parallel between Stalin’s “cult of the personality” and Mao’s is particularly striking. But the moment one examines the two processes on the basis of their substance and not their formal aspects, that is, on the basis of the relations between the different contending social forces, the differences become striking.

The progressive establishment of Stalin’s dictatorship over the Communist Party of the USSR was a process in which the power of the bureaucracy was progressively consolidated, the proletariat was progressively deprived of the exercise of political power. Stalin arose as an incarnation of the bureaucracy. This rise was possible because of the complete political passivity of the masses. That is how the authentic

Bolshevik forces, still considerable in 1923, although weakened, were cut to pieces and scattered, little by little, before they were physically liquidated.

In China, at the beginning of the process we had a deformed revolution, in which the proletariat played only a contributory role, and a peasant army took the place of independent action by the masses. Nor was there at the start an authentic Bolshevik party, imbued with the revolutionary and democratic tradition of the international working class movement. It was a party bearing a heavy Stalinist imprint, even if this was limited to the way it viewed and practiced democratic centralism. The state and party power were therefore far more bureaucratized in China from the start than was the case in the USSR of 1927; its proletariat was far weaker and its bureaucracy far stronger than at the moment when Stalin established his dictatorship.

The systematic organization of the “Mao cult” corresponded in no way with the need for a progressive abolition of soviet democracy or internal party democracy, since these never came into existence in China with the 1949 victory. It corresponded more with the needs of the inter-bureaucratic struggles, certain aspects of which remain obscure to this day. There was no deterioration in China in the relationship of forces between the bureaucracy and the masses at the expense of the masses comparable to that which took place in the USSR under Stalin. On the contrary, there was a weakening of the bureaucracy, hidden at first, then manifest, as a consequence of the shattering of its monolithic unity. Far from being completely passive and progressively demoralized, the masses had a reawakening, which was imperceptible at first but suddenly became apparent to the whole world during the month of January 1967. This is a significant difference from the Stalinist precedent. And its origin, in the last

analysis, is to be found in the completely changed international context: Instead of a succession of defeats of the international revolution from 1923 to 1933, there has been a rise in the world revolution since 1949. [25]

These considerations do not in any way justify identifying the progressive rise of the mass movement in China with the role played by Mao Tse-tung, as certain “leftists” imprudently assert in their eagerness to find support of the state powers. Mao’s turn in January; the way in which the demand for a return to a state founded on bodies of the Paris Commune type [26] was first reduced, then abandoned in fact; all of this confirms the absurdity of such identification, save to people who have no wish to look reality in the face. The “triple alliance” brought hardened bureaucrats to power everywhere. [27] There is not a single case of workers councils or organs of the soviet type arising in the plants, with the exception of the glassworks in Shanghai, in January 1967, and there it was quickly abandoned.

Besides this contradiction is an inherent characteristic of Mao’s thought. Insofar as he may be accorded an element of sincerity, his thought has a clearly tragic character. Mao calls for rebellion and the seizure of power. This must mean that the primary power no longer is an incarnation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in its pure state. But he does not look for the origins of its degeneration or danger of degeneration in the material infrastructure of society, in the inadequate development of productive forces, or the contradictions between this degree of development and the relationships of production. No, the origins of the danger of degeneration, according to him, are ideological. If revisionism is not extirpated at the roots on the theoretical, scientific, artistic and literary levels, the dictatorship of the proletariat must inevitably be overturned and the Chinese Communist

Party will become ... a fascist party. [28] It is hard to believe that an experienced Marxist could utter such enormities; nevertheless, they are spread in millions of copies throughout China.

This point of view is absolutely foreign to Marxism. The survival of semi-feudal ideology, semi-feudal art and literature – for example the ideology which inspired ultramontane Catholicism in the century following the French revolution – never led to the overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie. Of course the conquest of political power by *rising* social classes is prepared by intensive ideological struggles. But to imagine that *reactionary* classes have the same possibilities solely because of the survival of their ideology after the overthrow of their political power, is to deny all logic in social revolutions.

In reality, the whole weight of bourgeois or semi-feudal religion, art, literature and ideology is less of a threat to the Chinese workers state (let alone the Soviet workers state) than a single year of the survival of small-scale commodity production. Lenin had no illusions on this score. What prevents the definitive consolidation of the revolution is not the ideological weight of the past but the socio-economic reality of the present. The inadequate development of the productive forces means that economic automatism is acting against socialism and will continue to do so for a long time in that part of the world in which capitalism now stands abolished.

It follows as a matter of course that the subjective factor, the role of leadership, takes on an infinitely greater importance than it would under more favorable conditions. But it also follows that an *effective* struggle against the dangers of degeneration in the revolution cannot be unfolded in a decisive way on the ideological terrain but on the political

and social terrain, through organization of the exercise of economic and political power by the laboring masses, and through an increase in the specific weight, power and conscious cohesiveness of the proletariat. Failing to understand the problem of bureaucracy, of which Marx had a presentiment, Lenin an awareness, and which was analyzed in depth by Trotsky, Mao struggles with the phantom of a “restoration of capitalism” achieved “imperceptibly” by “revisionists” ... through reactionary plays and films! This conception, which is a total revision of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state, also winds up in the most grotesque conclusions: Is it possible that the state created by Mao himself, where it is now necessary to fight to “seize power,” was also controlled by a “bourgeois state apparatus” after all – as some of the Maoist extremists at least seem to imply? [29]

Mao Tse-tung abandons Marxist sociology based on objective criteria to submerge himself in a subjective “sociology” devoid of all scientific foundation. The capitalist is no longer a private owner of means of production who appropriates surplus value from workers compelled to sell him their labor power; anyone becomes a “capitalist” who is in disagreement with the “thought of Mao Tse-tung.” Substituting for the *bureaucratic* degeneration of the revolution a danger of *capitalist* restoration – largely imaginary except in case of defeat in an international war – he winds up with preaching remedies which reinforce the danger of degeneration instead of reducing it. For it is necessary to suppress the right of speech of all his opponents within the party once they have all become “partisans of the capitalist road.” A movement which began under the banner of “wider democracy” and of the right of the minority “to argue their case and reserve their views” because “sometimes the truth is with the minority,” winds up by stifling every discordant opinion and suppressing every minority (which, as soon as it

opposes Mao, is by virtue of that automatically “counter-revolutionary”).

For Trotskyism, the experience of the “cultural revolution” confirms that the theory of the possible degeneration of a victorious socialist revolution, a theory which was considered heretical 20 years ago by the entire official Communist movement, has now been partly admitted by practically all of the victorious revolutions since the second world war. Tito, Castro, Mao Tse-tung have all picked it up, each in his own way. The need for a political revolution, for a “revolution within a revolution,” as the Cubans say today, begins to make its appearance in a not negligible part of the international Communist movement. But the experience of the “cultural revolution” also demonstrates that there is no other road for *effective* struggle against the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution than the one outlined by Lenin and Trotsky: the consolidation and institutionalization of workers power on the basis of democratically elected councils (Soviets); the widest proletarian democracy; the right of several soviet tendencies and parties to exist legally within that framework; the limitation and progressive abolition of inequality in remuneration; the management of the economy by the workers themselves; the planned development of the productive forces; the international extension of the revolution.

May 20, 1967

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### **Postscript**

The information received from China during the six months which have evolved since this article was written have substantially confirmed the general line of

analysis contained in it. Notwithstanding sharper and sharper public attacks against the “Chinese Khrushchev” – who is in certain articles presented as the “main enemy of the Chinese people,” i.e. as a greater enemy than Chiang Kai-shek or American imperialism! – the Mao faction is far from having won the struggle. It has only succeeded in rebuilding a new apparatus under its own control in a minority of cities or provinces. Often, as in Wu Han and Canton, it has been met with such resolute resistance by the opposing faction that armed clashes, street fights and other violent incidents broke out. [30] Sometimes – as at the An-Shan steel works – it was even forced to make a partial retreat under the pressure of economic difficulties. Nowhere can it be said to have attained its main goal: to eliminate definitively the influence of the Liu-Teng faction from the state apparatus, the party, the mass organizations and especially among the masses themselves.

One should of course not confuse the successive and inevitable differentiations among the Red Guards (which have recently led the Maoists to forbid the circulation in Peking of Red Guard organs published in other cities), or the autonomous actions of the masses for their own economic and democratic goals (like the storming of jails in order to liberate prisoners), with the activities of the anti-Mao factions. But these factions continue to enjoy a certain amount of popular support in many places, which enables them to entrench themselves not only inside the apparatus but among part of the masses as well.



Mao had to admit this in his own way when he wrote that there exist no “objective reasons” which justify a division of the working class; this implies that such a division, however “unjustified” it may appear to Mao (who has forgotten all he wrote before on the rights of minorities and the inevitability of differences of opinion “inside the people”), is indeed a fact. And this fact weighs heavily on the development of the “cultural revolution,” driving it towards a general slowdown and more and more devious and tortuous *detours*, which begin to look suspiciously like a precipitous retreat.

The great weakness of the “opposition” (which in the beginning undoubtedly enjoyed the support of the majority of the bureaucracy, and even today has very powerful positions inside the apparatus, notwithstanding the desperate attempts of the Maoists to “recuperate” a large part of it) is its inability to take the offensive. For two reasons: because it is afraid of a generalized mass action which would outflank it even more easily than it outflanked the Mao faction, and because it does not dare attack the Mao myth as such, which it has itself created and which it considers indispensable for the bureaucracy as a whole.

But its great strength resides in the power of inertia of the local and regional apparatus, in which it is deeply entrenched, and the inability of the Maoists to rebuild a central apparatus after they provoked its initial disintegration. Under these circumstances, it is true, the army has become the only structure in China which retains a high degree of national centralization. However, it would be exaggerated to draw from this the conclusion that China is reverting towards a military dictatorship. The contending party factions have reproduced their own sub-factions inside the army, and both Mao and Liu have been extremely cautious to avoid direct clashes between these contending army groups, which could

lead not only to a danger of civil war but also to a decisive weakening of the country in face of the threat of military aggression by US imperialism. [31] The army itself, while intervening in several places in favor of the Mao faction, has been up until now unwilling to massively crush Mao's opponents, obviously for the same reasons.

This also explains why, notwithstanding many verbal threats, there has not been any wholesale repression of Mao's opponents, not to speak of bloody purges of the Stalinist type. In fact, everything seems to have been forcing the Maoists to accept a certain *de facto* sharing of power (territorially and sometimes in the same province and city) with their opponents, be it only in the form of an uneasy truce and for a temporary period. The fear of autonomous mass actions operates to the same end, i.e. it recalls a certain common interest the contending factions of the bureaucracy have in defending their positions *vis-à-vis* the masses.

During the last months, the stepping up of the campaign of public denunciation of "China's Khrushchev" has also provided new material on the real differences between the Mao and the Liu-Teng factions. We must continue to be cautious before accepting literally all of the Maoists "denunciations" of Liu's past and present "crimes." The attempt to make Liu Shao-chi a scapegoat for the right-wing opportunist concessions which the whole CCP leadership (including Mao) was ready to make towards the "national bourgeoisie," both in the 1945-46 and in the 1949-51 period, is obvious. An attempt to make him a scapegoat of the right-wing opportunist mistakes made by the Mao leadership towards the Sukarno and Ne Win regimes in Indonesia and Burma in 1964-65 might be expected soon. Nevertheless, part of these denunciations and diatribes obviously concern the

root of the differences, e.g. over the question of agricultural policies.

It now seems that at a plenum of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee in January 1962, Liu Shao-chi had got a clear majority, both for condemning the excesses of the “great leap forward,” and for imposing a minimum of inner-bureaucratic democracy, by having that body accept the rule which the Maoists now call “sinister”: “So long as they are not guilty of treason, it is not an offense for party members to speak their minds at party meetings.” Already in September 1961, Liu Shao-chi had “imposed” the *Decision of the Central Committee on Training by Rotation the Cadres of the Whole Party*, to promote – we quote from a Maoist organ – “so-called freedom of thought and freedom of discussion, and to give bourgeois [!] ideology the greenlight so that those who were dissatisfied with the Party might openly and outrageously attack the Party and socialism.” The slanderous distortion consisting in adding the words “and socialism” to this sentence is obvious. Both quotations come from a Maoist publication, **Wen-hua Ko-ming Tung-hsun (Cultural Revolution Bulletin)**, No. 11, May 1967, published by the “Revolutionary Rebels” of the Department of Philosophy of Peking University.

New material has been published by the Maoist press confirming the process of rapid differentiation among the peasantry referred to in our article. An HNA article published on August 29, 1967 quotes a report about Chengpei commune, in the Shanghai area, where land is said to have been *de facto* redistributed, with twelve “former [?] poor and lower middle peasant households” receiving a *per capita* surface less than half of that reverting *per capita* to six “well-to-do middle peasant households.” A **Renmin Ribao** article of August 22, 1967 speaks about a district of Shansi province where out of

210 households of one village, 23 “of the former [!] poor and lower-middle peasant families were driven by poverty to sell the land and houses they had received during the land reform” (the year this happened is not indicated). In both cases, the poor peasants are said to have been compelled to sell their labor power to the former [!] rich peasants.

In any case these facts prove the growing differentiation and social tensions in the countryside. They do not necessarily prove that Liu proposed a “right-wing” policy nor even that proposing such a policy would have been incorrect in itself. Let us not forget that Rakovsky and Trotsky vigorously pleaded in favor of a retreat from forced collectivization in 1932. We do not know whether Liu really proposed reestablishment of private farming after the disasters of the “great leap forward” 1959-61; we only know that he wanted to give greater initiatives and greater material incentives to households and work teams (by establishing production quotas per household). In itself, there is nothing wrong with this, provided the objective situation is such as to make such temporary concessions necessary.

What must make us doubly careful lest we be taken in by some of the Maoists’ slanders is the fact that Liu and other leaders of anti-Mao forces inside the bureaucracy (like Tao Chu) are being accused of having proposed policies which were “leftist in appearance.” [32] When **Renmin Ribao** wants to “prove” that Liu’s line is “revisionist” through and through, strike-breaking and tending to “restore capitalism,” by stating that “he [Liu] dreamed of establishing workers’ Soviets that would place the trade-unions [?] above the party and the government” (HNA, London Bulletin of October 8, 1967, page 9), one can hardly follow the dizzy turn of this sort of reasoning.

Chinese society is in the throes of a deep upheaval. Mao's attempt at reforming the bureaucracy without having the masses question the whole of the bureaucratic regime has failed. [33] In the same way Liu's attempt to keep the inter-bureaucratic dispute under rigid control of inner-party rules devised by the bureaucracy has not in the least succeeded. Independent mass action and independent critical thought have surged among the rebellious youth as well as among the rebellious workers. The task of the revolutionary Marxists is to clearly show to the Chinese proletariat a way out of the political *impasse* and crisis, appearing as an alternative leadership to both contending factions by uniting revolutionary *Red Guards* with rebellious working masses on the platform of the political revolution, the platform of the establishment of proletarian democracy, of power wielded by Soviets of workers, poor peasants, soldiers and students.

December 1, 1967

## Footnotes

1. This rejection stands in contrast to the declaration by the Chinese leaders that they will defend the USSR in the event of an imperialist attack, repeated as late as March 22, 1966, in the letter replying negatively to Brezhnev's invitation to attend the Twenty-third Congress of the CPUSSR. (Hsinhua News Agency (HNA), March 24, 1966.)

2. See especially the April 4, 1967, HNA dispatch from Shanghai: "The poor and lower middle peasants on the outskirts of Shanghai have responded whole-heartedly to the appeal of Chairman Mao ..."

**3.** **Collection of the laws and Regulations of the People's Republic of China**, Vol. II. Cited by Ezra F, Vogel: *From*

*Revolutionary to Semi-Bureaucrat*, in **The China Quarterly**, No. 29, January–March 1967, p. 51.

4. As a gauge: Average wages for an unskilled worker are 40–50 yuan a month; for a skilled worker, 70–80 yuan; for a university professor, 100 yuan. A pair of shoes costs 10 yuan; 750 grams (about 1 lb. 10 oz.) of rice, from 0.1 to 0.2 yuan!

5. To these major social tensions, one must add the tension between the mass of the urban population and the privileged survivors of the former bourgeoisie, who receive about 50 million dollars annually in interest and who often live in great luxury. But even though the Red Guards have attacked the restaurants and clubs frequented by these former bourgeois, as well as their homes, there is no indication at the moment that Mao, who is so determined about combating the “roots” of capitalism in the writings of his factional opponents, has suppressed the tangible advantages of the real Chinese capitalists.

6. We must, however, point out the case of the economist Sun Ken-fang, whose ideas are clearly hostile to those of Mao and have been made public. In this connection, see Livio Maitan: *The ‘Great Cultural Revolution’*, (**Quatrième Internationale**, No. 29, November 1966)

7. See the editorial in **Renmin Ribao**, July 1, 1966.

8. See the article from the Shanghai **Jiefang Ribao**, May 10, 1966, reprinted in **Peking Review** May 27, 1966.

9. The circular was made public in the May 17, 1967, London bulletin of the Hsinhua News Agency.

10. On the occasion of the 16th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China, Peng Chen declared: “In these circumstances, it is all the more necessary for cadres at various levels to know how to listen to the opinion of the masses, and to allow different opinions to be fully expressed.” (See F. Charlier: *The Purge Spreads in People’s China*, **Perspective Mondiale**, Vol. 1, No. 5.)

11. Support for this hypothesis can be found in the fact that Vice Prime Minister Ho Lung, who has been associated with Peng Chen in some of the Red Guard denunciations, is the author of an article

which is rather remarkable for the democratic theses it defends: *The Democratic Tradition of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*.

12. See, for instance, the article which appeared in **Hongqi (The Red Banner)** of March 1967 which states that the “work group” at the University of Tsing-hua dismissed 70 per cent of the cadres.

13. If proof is wanted of the frenzied anti-Khrushchevism of Liu Shao-chi, accused today of being the “Chinese Khrushchev,” it is sufficient to refer to his speech of April 28, 1966, at the height of the “cultural revolution” on the occasion of a reception honoring Mehmet Shehu and the Albanian delegation which had come to China: “The Soviet modern revisionists have gone farther and farther along the path of capitulation to imperialism. They have already degenerated into renegades from Marxism-Leninism and accomplices of US imperialism.” (**Peking Review**, May 6, 1966.)

14. All these quotations are from **Peking Review**, August 12, 1966.

15. The Maoists took a clear stand against shifting workers about after the manner of the Red Guards (**Renmin Ribao**, February 12 and February 14, 1967).

16. How can one reconcile the slogan declaring that “the rebellion is justified” with the one declaring that it is necessary to achieve “unity with more than 95 per cent of the cadres”? (**Renmin Ribao** editorial in **Peking Review**, April 14, 1967.) And why must millions of people be mobilized in order to eliminate a mere “handful of officials”?

17. HNA distributed an interview datelined Peking April 6, 1967, with an American living in China, Erwin Engst, expressly stating that differences in salaries, with a spread from one to eight, according to this source, are not in conformity with the principles of the Paris Commune and ought to be gradually reduced.

18. A particularly odious example: the way the Peking paper **Shingangshan** of January 11, 1967, glorifies the fact that Red Guards “captured” the wife of Liu Shao-chi by a ruse, attracting her to a hospital by making her believe that her daughter had been victim of a serious accident.

19. The Peking paper **Shingkangshan** of January 23, 1967, states that on the previous evening several hundred Red Guards demonstrated under the flag of the “Committee for united action of the Red Guards of the capital,” shouting: “Down with the Cultural Revolution group of the Central Committee!” “Long live Liu Shao-chi!”

20. In this connection see the *Message from the People of Tsingtao* after the Maoist “seizure of power.” (**Wen-hui Pao** of Hong Kong, January 31, 1967.)

21. The foreign press, particularly the Japanese, reported a general strike in Shanghai and Nanking, and big strikes at Wuhan, Fuchow, Chekiang and Shenyang. We are restricting ourselves deliberately to quoting Chinese sources exclusively.

22. Lenin used “economism” to designate the tendency which believes that the trade-union economic struggle of the workers is *sufficient* to achieve their emancipation. The idea of *condemning* the very demands themselves under this term would never have entered his mind!

23. HNA dispatch from Peking, March 24, 1967.

24. The editorial cited above from **Renmin Riabao**, reproduced in **Peking Review** of April 14, 1967, coldly declares that Liu Shao-chi “represented ... the interests of the Chinese bourgeoisie,” that he “represented ... the bourgeois reactionary line ... in the past 17 years,” that “This man’s ambition is to develop capitalism and bring about a capitalist restoration in China.” One has to ask how, under these conditions, Mao Tse-tung allowed him to become president of the People’s Republic of China, a position to which he was reelected on January 3, 1965. The **Peking Review** of January 8, 1965, which displays a large photograph of Mao Tse-tung and Liu Shao-chi standing side by side, and which declares that “over 100,000 workers, peasants, governmental cadres, students, army men” assembled to celebrate the happy occasion, is consequently particularly discrediting ... for Mao. Is it possible that the secret ambition of the latter was to put this representative of the bourgeoisie in the number two position in China and in the post of his official successor? It is also necessary to condemn the



demagogic and dishonest character of the campaign launched against Liu Shao-chi's book: **In Order To Be a Good Communist**. The Maoist press, which is violently attacking the book "because it does not base its position on the dictatorship of the proletariat," pretends to be unaware of the fact that it was written in 1939, and that Mao's pamphlet: **The New Democracy**, written a year later and today extolled to the high heavens, not only "does not base its position on the dictatorship of the proletariat" but explicitly *condemns* its application in China "at the present stage."

25. It must be added that Stalin's rise corresponds with the theory of socialism in a single country and with more and more peaceful coexistence with imperialism, whereas the Maoists have been constantly referring to the world revolution during the course of the "cultural revolution."

26. The idea of electing organs of power by the universal suffrage of working people – the basic idea of the Paris Commune – has not been applied in a single case where the triple alliance "seized power."

27. Examples: The "revolutionary committee" of Shantung is headed by Mu Lin, member of the secretariat of the former provincial committee which had been stripped of its functions. The new chairman of the "revolutionary committee" of Shansi is the head of the Communist Party central core in this province. In Tsingtao, the vice mayor of the city directed the "seizure of power." In Shanghai, the former head of the security police is chairman of the "revolutionary committee," etc.

28. **Kuangming Ribao** of Peking, April 8, 1967, paraphrasing a quotation from Mao. And see, for instance, what Mao's wife, Chiang Ching wrote: "If our literature and art do not correspond to the socialist economic base, they will inevitably [*sic*] destroy it." (**Hungi Chonpao** of Peking, February 15, 1967.)

29. "The Marxist principle of destroying the old bourgeois state machinery must be applied in organizations which have decayed, because a handful of party people in positions of authority and taking the capitalist road have been entrenched there for a long time. The organs of the bourgeoisie [*sic*] must be completely

destroyed there and organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat must be reestablished there.” (**Kuangming Ribao** of Peking, March 3, 1967.)

**30.** The Wu Han incident is well-known (see **World Outlook**, Vol.5, No.29, August 25, 1967 issue). Less is known about the bloody incidents which occurred in Canton between July 12 and September 2, 1967, which led to negotiations between the representatives of contending Red Guard factions before Premier Chou En-lai in Peking. It is interesting to note that, according to the Canton **San-szu Chan-pao** (a Red Guard tabloid) of August 24, 1967, the differences which led to these clashes involved problems of revolutionary strategy in Hong Kong, questions of how to support the struggle of the Hong Kong workers, and problems of international revolutionary strategy. It is also interesting to see that in these clashes the Canton army leadership seems to have intervened against the most faithful Maoists.

**31.** See Mao’s instructions, according to Canton **Wen-ko Tung-hsin (Cultural Revolution Bulletin**, a tabloid published October 9, 1967, by the 820 Agency of Red Headquarters of State Organs of Canton City, in collaboration with a Shanghai group): “There must be no chaos in our army. If there are problems within the Liberation Army, negotiations can be conducted within the scope of each individual province.”

**32.** See the Canton **Yenan Huo-chi**, of October 5, 1967.

**33.** The Maoist leadership has started to openly accuse the Red Guards, especially those of Peking, of attacking differences of income, and explaining the “bourgeois” deviations of the “right-wingers” by high incomes (**Kan Chin Chao**, October 15, 1967, reporting a discussion between Chou En-lai and Peking Red Guard factions, which are denounced as “anarchists” and “ultra-lefts”). Obviously for the Maoists, “bourgeois restoration” and “rightism” have nothing to do either with income or with capital: Everything is a question of pure ideas, i.e. not admitting 100 per cent submission to “Mao’s thought”! It must be noted that the consistent campaign led against material incentives is another important ideological difference between Maoism and “classic” Stalinism, even if the theory of material incentives is attributed to Liu and not to Stalin.

Han Suiyin, in a book just published, **China in the Year 2000**, which is a thoroughgoing apology of Mao and the “cultural revolution,” underlines this difference, and opposes Mao’s struggle against his opponents by “mass mobilizations” to Stalin’s struggle by mass purges, physical reprisals and complete bureaucratization of state and party apparatuses.

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