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Mao Tse-Tung, Marxist

David Fernbach



Anglo-Chinese Educational Institute

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ANGLO-CHINESE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE

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Preface

This text was originally drafted as a talk to students. It does not seek to compete with the many excellent books now available on Mao's life and the Chinese revolution as a whole. It simply sets out to locate the main features of Mao's development of the doctrines of Marx and Lenin, as these took shape in the practical context of China's class struggles and her struggle for national liberation. A small part was published in October 1976, in *China Now*.

Foreword

The tributes that Mao Tse-tung's death brought from government and opinion leaders across the world were unparalleled. Even bitter enemies of communism have had to pay their respects, and acknowledge the giant's step from misery towards happiness that the Chinese people made under his leadership. Mao Tse-tung, they admit, was a great statesman, a great leader of China, and a great champion of his people's welfare. But in tributes of this kind, and they are the great majority, the one vital thread in Mao's life that holds all others together tends generally to get left out, or at least its importance is ignored. For Mao Tse-tung was above all else a Marxist, a follower of Marx and Lenin, and in everything that he did for China he sought to apply and develop the ideas of Marxism-Leninism, in the specific conditions of the Chinese revolution.

It is precisely in this way that Mao's significance transcends that of China alone, and makes him the world figure that he undoubtedly is. Mao inherited from Marx and Lenin a doctrine that had grown up in Europe, and when in China 'the salvoes of the October [Russian] revolution brought us Marxism-Leninism', as Mao later wrote, Marxism had still not fully outgrown its initial Eurocentrism. Not only has Mao applied and developed Marx's teachings to a new stage (matched only by the achievements of Lenin on which Mao himself built) but, in the process, Marxism – the unsurpassed theory of human liberation – has ceased to be merely European in its significance. It has become at last a genuinely global doctrine.

The object of this essay is to summarise the achievements of Mao as a Marxist, to follow his theoretical advances that run parallel with the development of the Chinese revolution itself, from the 1920s through to the very end of Mao's life. Constantly Mao learned from the experience of popular struggles, and fed back the lessons to guide the progress of these struggles in a practical way. Mao's achievements as a Marxist can be broadly divided into two parts corresponding essentially to the two great stages through which the Chinese revolution has developed – the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution.

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1: The democratic revolution

In one fundamental respect, the world we live in today is not the world that Marx and Engels depicted in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848: the missing term is imperialism. Marx certainly saw that the development of capitalism had made 'nations of peasants dependent on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West'. But he still believed that for all the oppression and exploitation this involved, the first capitalist countries of Western Europe and North America would draw the rest of the world in their wake, as capitalism spread homogeneously outwards from its original heartlands. '[The bourgeoisie] compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production . . . to become bourgeois themselves. In short, it creates a world after its own image'.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, it was becoming increasingly evident that this was not so. The gap between rich and poor nations was becoming not narrower but wider. In their last years Marx and Engels began to revise their conception of world development, but it was left to Lenin, in 1916, to analyse the basic features of imperialism as an established new stage of capitalism, the highest stage of capitalist development.

Fundamental to Lenin's politics, and after him the politics of Mao, is the fact that in the twentieth century, when Marxists had to face the problem of making the proletarian revolution, actively leading the exploited masses to build a communist society, capitalism had already been transformed into a world system in which the vast majority of the earth's population were exploited and oppressed by a handful of metropolitan powers – a situation which has not been basically overcome even today.

In October 1917, with reference to the revision of the Bolshevik party programme, Lenin wrote:

It would perhaps be expedient to emphasise more strongly and to express more vividly in our programme the prominence of the handful of the richest imperialist countries which prosper parasitically by robbing colonies and weaker nations. This is an extremely important feature of imperialism. To a certain extent it facilitates the rise of powerful revolutionary movements in countries subjected to imperialist plunder and in danger of being crushed and partitioned by the imperialist giants (such as Russia); and on the other hand it tends, to a certain extent, to prevent the rise of profound revolutionary movements in the countries

that plunder by imperialist methods many colonies and foreign lands, and thus make a comparatively large portion of their population participants in the division of the imperialist loot.¹

In other words, the world revolutionary front had been extended by the development of imperialism; the relative strength of the proletariat might have been weakened somewhat in the metropolitan countries, as a result of the participation of the working class in imperialist plunder. On the other hand, in those countries oppressed by imperialism, the proletariat found a potentially valuable ally in the national liberation movements. The fundamental slogan of the Communist movement was thus extended by Lenin from 'Workers of all countries, unite!' to 'Workers of all countries, and all oppressed peoples, unite!'

Stages of revolution

Marxists in backward countries such as China, just as Marxists in the most advanced capitalist countries, set their sights on the eventual achievement of communism. But in the colonial and semi-colonial countries oppressed by imperialism, the working class, even together with such allies as the poor and lower-middle peasants, is not yet strong enough to win in a struggle against a united front of its enemies: the imperialists and their 'comprador' agents, the feudal landlords, the locally based or 'national' bourgeoisie, and the rich peasants. The question therefore arises of the 'stages' of the revolutionary process. Is there a stage prior to the socialist revolution, which Marxists should strive for first of all? And if so, what does it consist of?

The problem of stages is not just peculiar to the colonial countries. Lenin had already confronted and solved a problem of stages in imperialist but backward Russia, and this is a necessary basis for understanding the strategy that Mao was to develop in China, and his contribution to Marxism-Leninism in general.

In Russia of the 1900s, when the great majority of the people were still peasants, the industrial proletariat had already developed a strong class movement, led by the Bolshevik party; all classes except a tiny minority were oppressed by the remains of feudalism and tsarist autocracy. Their first task was to make a bourgeois-democratic revolution against the feudal landlords and their absolute monarchy, yet the Russian bourgeoisie, scared of the developing workers' movement, was not prepared to engage in a decisive revolutionary struggle with tsarism. Therefore, as Lenin put it, 'In the view of the Bolsheviks the proletariat has laid upon it the task of pursuing the bourgeois-democratic revolution to its consum-

mation and of being its leader'. However, he went on, 'This is only possible if the proletariat is able to carry with it the masses of the democratic petty bourgeoisie, especially of the peasantry, in the struggle against the autocracy and the treacherous liberal bourgeoisie'.²

Lenin thus put forward the perspective of a revolution to be carried out in two stages. In the first, bourgeois-democratic stage, the proletariat had to maintain an alliance with the whole of the peasantry – poor, middle and rich – against feudalism and absolutism; in the second, socialist stage, the proletariat, together with the poorer strata of the peasantry, could go on to attack capitalism itself. For Lenin:

Strictly differentiating between stages that are essentially different, soberly examining the conditions under which they manifest themselves, does not at all mean indefinitely postponing one's ultimate aim or slowing down one's progress in advance. On the contrary, it is for the purpose of accelerating the advance and achieving the ultimate aim as quickly and securely as possible that it is necessary to understand the relation of classes in modern society.³

On the other hand, as Lenin was to write after 1917:

To attempt to raise an artificial Chinese wall between the first and the second [stage], to separate them by anything else than the degree of preparedness of the proletariat, and the degree of its unity with the poor peasants, means to distort Marxism dreadfully, to vulgarise it, to replace it with liberalism.⁴

In his conception of the stages of the Russian revolution, Lenin was opposed both to the Mensheviks, who refused to entertain the idea of proletarian leadership in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and to Trotsky who, under the slogan of 'permanent revolution', failed to distinguish the two stages and to realise the proletariat's need for the entire peasantry as an ally during the bourgeois-democratic stage. As Lenin wrote in 1915: 'From the Bolsheviks, Trotsky's original theory has borrowed their call for a decisive proletarian revolutionary struggle, while from the Mensheviks it has borrowed 'repudiation' of the role of the peasantry'.⁵

To turn to the specific problems of the revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries, it was generally held in the Comintern as early as the 1920s that the two immediate targets of a people's revolution in a country such as China were foreign imperialism on the one hand and domestic feudalism on the other. The first stage of the colonial revolution was thus a bourgeois-democratic one of a specific type.

Foreign influence

In 'The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party', written in December 1939, Mao analysed the impact of foreign capitalist penetration on traditional Chinese feudal society. On the one hand, foreign capitalism had

undermined the foundations of [China's] self-sufficient natural economy and wrecked the handicraft industries both in the cities and in the peasants' homes, it hastened the growth of a commodity economy in town and country and gave rise to certain objective conditions and possibilities for the development of capitalist production in China [since] the destruction of the natural economy created a commodity market for capitalism, while the bankruptcy of large numbers of peasants and handicraftsmen provided it with a labour market.⁶

On the other hand, however, through the comprador class of merchant capitalists by which it penetrated the Chinese countryside, imperialism had 'colluded with the Chinese feudal forces to arrest the development of capitalism', i.e. of nationally based capitalist production.

Here Mao was developing and applying to China what was already the accepted position of the Comintern, which had resolved in its 1928 Programme:

Everywhere imperialism attempts to preserve and to perpetuate all those pre-capitalist forces of exploitation (especially in the villages) which serve as the basis for the existence of its reactionary allies.

Stalin had written even earlier:

Imperialism, with all its financial and military might, is the force in China which supports, inspires, fosters and preserves the feudal survivals, together with their entire bureaucratic military superstructure.⁷

Mao drew the conclusion from this analysis that 'the two fundamental tasks, the national revolution and the democratic revolution, are at once distinct and united'.

Unless imperialist rule is overthrown, the role of the feudal landlord class cannot be terminated because imperialism is its main support. Conversely, unless help is given to the peasants in their struggle to overthrow the feudal landlord class, it will be impossible to build powerful revolutionary contingents to overthrow imperialist rule.⁸

In the anti-imperialist revolution, the forces that could be mobilised were

basically three in number: the industrial proletariat, the peasantry together with the urban petty bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie. From the standpoint of the proletariat, both peasantry and national bourgeoisie were potential allies. The importance of the peasantry as a revolutionary force had always been recognised by Lenin and his successors. As for the national bourgeoisie, Lenin wrote in 1920 that the Communist party 'must enter into temporary alliance with the bourgeois democrats in the colonies and backward countries . . . but should in all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form'.⁹

There were, in other words, alliances and alliances. Once the proletariat had come to be organised into an independent Communist party, it was not to be expected that it would passively tag along behind the national bourgeoisie that exploited it. This was certainly not Lenin's idea, and in the text just quoted he in fact looked forward to the anti-imperialist revolution avoiding a capitalist path of development. But how could the proletariat, a small minority in all the colonial countries, take over the leadership of the revolution and carry it forward from the bourgeois-democratic to the socialist stage? This critical problem could not be solved in advance, even by Lenin; it was only Mao Tse-tung who managed to solve it, in the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution, and in a manner that has general significance for all countries oppressed by imperialism.

The problems involved in an anti-imperialist United Front were demonstrated extremely sharply in China during the 1920s. The Communist Party of China (CPC) was formed in the midst of a great upsurge of the anti-imperialist movement, initially led by the national bourgeoisie through the Kuomintang (KMT). In its struggle to defeat the warlord armies, expel the imperialists and unite China, the KMT needed the support of the broad masses, and it also found Soviet Russia a valuable ally. In this situation, the Comintern sponsored a United Front of an original character between the KMT and CPC, in which CP members joined the KMT as individuals and worked within it, while still preserving their own organisation outside.

This arrangement assisted the CPC to grow rapidly, and to build up a trained military cadre which turned out to be very important. But in 1926-27, when the revolutionary mass movement of workers and peasants reached a level which the bourgeoisie could no longer tolerate, the KMT turned against the CPC and decimated its working-class cadre. The first United Front failed: it was destroyed by the reactionary faction of the KMT.

The peasantry

At this crucial turning-point, Mao Tse-tung, aged 33, was a prominent figure in the CPC without being a member of its top leadership. He had in fact already distanced himself somewhat from the mainstream of Chinese Communism in this period. Like Lenin in Russia a quarter of a century earlier, Mao had to wage a constant struggle to get his urban-orientated comrades to understand the importance of the peasantry. In China the peasantry had an even more important role to play in the revolution. During the first United Front of 1924-27, the young and inexperienced CPC paid little heed to the developing peasant movement. Under the leadership of Chen Tu-hsiu, the party even perceived this movement as a threat to its alliance with the bourgeois nationalists in the Kuomintang. It was against this tendency that Mao wrote his 'Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society' in March 1926, and a year later his 'Report on an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan', only a few weeks before Chiang Kai-shek turned against the CPC and the United Front disintegrated.

'Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society' opens with the words: 'Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution'. After discussing the landlord and comprador classes (the main enemies), the middle or national bourgeoisie, and the various sections of the peasantry, urban petty bourgeoisie, semi-proletariat and lumpenproletariat, as well as the industrial working class itself, Mao comes to the conclusion that 'the entire semi-proletariat and petty bourgeoisie' (in the terminology of the time this included the semi-proletarian and petty-bourgeois sections of the peasantry) were the closest 'friends' of the proletariat.

As for the vacillating middle bourgeoisie, however, their right-wing may become our enemy and their left-wing may become our friend – but we must be constantly on our guard and not let them create confusion within our ranks.¹⁰

Under Chen Tu-hsiu, the CPC was not sufficiently on guard, and it paid a heavy price.

A year later the peasantry were in spontaneous rebellion in several of China's provinces. In his 'Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan', Mao extolled the revolutionary potential of the peasantry in no uncertain terms, concluding:

All talk directed against the peasant movement must be speedily set right. All the wrong measures taken by the revolutionary authorities concerning the peasant movement must be speedily changed. Only thus can the future of the revolution

be benefited. For the present upsurge of the peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back. They will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants and evil gentry into their graves. Every revolutionary party and every revolutionary comrade will be put to the test, to be accepted or rejected as they decide. There are three alternatives. To march at their head and lead them? To trail behind them, gesticulating and criticising? Or to stand in their way and oppose them? Every Chinese is free to choose, but events will force you to make the choice quickly.¹¹

Importance of the countryside

Only weeks later, the Communist Party's urban base was in ruins; but it maintained a skeletal military cadre, and by leading certain minor units of the KMT armed forces in revolt, in the autumn of 1927, Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh and their comrades established the first rural base area in the Chinggang mountains.

From this point on, the character of the Chinese revolution was marked by two new aspects. One of these had already been understood by the Comintern at an earlier stage. As Stalin put it, 'in China the armed revolution is fighting the armed counter-revolution'.¹² However, a more novel side to the Chinese revolution – not so evident at first and far more difficult for Comintern orthodoxy to accept – was gradually being developed by Mao Tse-tung.

As the Comintern saw it at this time, the countryside could only be a place of *tactical* retreat for the revolutionary armed forces, while they prepared to strike back and capture at least certain key cities. Following the adventurist lines of Chu Chiu-pai and Li Li-san, such attempts were constantly made during the next three years by the CPC armed forces.

For Mao, however, the countryside had a *strategic* significance. From the earliest days on Chinggangshan he sought to build up in the countryside the political power of the workers and peasants. It is true that, in these early days, Mao did not foresee how long it would be before the revolutionary forces would capture the cities. He still shared the common expectation that there would be a new 'revolutionary high tide' in the near future. But the crucial difference between Mao's conception and that prevalent in the Comintern and the CPC leadership emerges as early as his 'How Can Red Political Power Exist in China?', written in October 1928.

It was difficult for the Communist movement at this time to accept that

the political and military cadre of a Communist party could retreat into the countryside, develop on the basis of an almost entirely peasant population, yet still preserve its Marxist-Leninist character and thus be able to organise the peasantry under the leadership of the proletariat. Trotsky and his followers, with a mechanical conception of the relations of party and class, denied this possibility on principle, and constantly predicted the inevitable degeneration of Mao's forces into warlordism and banditry.

Since the misunderstanding persists, among people who have not read Mao's writings, that Mao 'preferred' the peasantry to the working class as the base of revolution, it is worth quoting some relevant formulations of Mao's on this subject. In the programmatic text 'The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party', for example, which was written in 1939, twelve years after the CPC had been driven out of the cities, Mao reiterated that the proletariat was 'the basic motive force of the Chinese revolution'. 'Unless it is led by the proletariat, the Chinese revolution cannot possibly succeed'. Despite its numerical weakness, Mao held that the Chinese proletariat had three particularly outstanding qualities.

First, the Chinese proletariat is more resolute and thoroughgoing in revolutionary struggle than any other class because it is subjected to a threefold oppression (imperialist, bourgeois and feudal) which is marked by a severity and cruelty seldom found in other countries. Since there is no economic basis for social reformism in colonial and semi-colonial China as there is in Europe, the whole proletariat, with the exception of a few scabs, is most revolutionary.

Secondly, from the moment it appeared on the revolutionary scene, the Chinese proletariat came under the leadership of its own revolutionary party – the Communist Party of China – and became the most politically conscious class in Chinese society.

Thirdly, because the Chinese proletariat by origin is largely made up of bankrupted peasants, it has natural ties with the peasant masses, which facilitates its forming a close alliance with them.¹³

Hegemony of the proletariat

While Mao had insisted even before 1927 that the proletariat needed the broad mass of the Chinese peasantry as its ally in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the revolutionary strategy centred on the rural base areas was not his subjective preference. It was simply required by the objective situation. As Mao put it in 1939:

Since China's key cities have long been occupied by the powerful imperialists and their reactionary Chinese allies, it is imperative for the revolutionary ranks to

turn the backward villages into advanced, consolidated base areas, into great military, political, economic and cultural bastions of the revolution.¹⁴

In this way, Mao held that the proletariat, through the CPC, could exert its hegemony over the democratic revolution, and thus lead it to a successful conclusion, which the bourgeois-nationalist KMT had proved itself unable to do. Like many developments in revolutionary strategy and tactics, notably those of Lenin himself in Russia, this was a possibility that had not previously been envisaged by the Communist movement. But Mao's confidence in its feasibility proved well-founded. Step by step, the Communist Party and its armed forces, far from degenerating into warlordism or banditry, liberated 150 million Chinese from imperialist rule, totally defeated the KMT and embarked on the socialist stage of the Chinese revolution.

Within the rural base areas, the Party was able to organise the poor and lower-middle peasants to carry out land reform. Mao's reliance on the peasantry was based on the premise that in a country like China the proletariat could win over the great majority of the peasantry as an ally. But this had to be done by carefully distinguishing the different strata of the peasantry, and treating them appropriately. Mao saw the rural population broadly divided into landlords (5 per cent); rich peasants, who regularly exploited hired labour but also worked the land themselves (5 per cent); middle peasants, mainly self-supporting but of whom some (the upper-middle) had slightly more land than they needed, while others (lower-middle) had slightly less (20 per cent); and finally poor peasants, with no land or insufficient land (70 per cent). The poor peasants were 'the natural and most reliable ally of the proletariat and the main contingent of China's revolutionary forces'.¹⁵

But Mao discovered through the practice of land reform that the revolutionary movement could not simply base itself on the poor peasants alone. An ultra-left land reform policy of confiscation of rich peasant land, and equalisation of all holdings, which was initially carried out in the Chingkangshan base, turned out to alienate not only the rich and upper-middle peasants, but also many of the lower-middle and even poor peasants who had family and clan ties with the former. To unite all who could be united against the main enemy, the landlords and their allies, it was necessary, first, to distinguish clearly between landlords and rich peasants, and to leave the latter adequate holdings. Second, to distinguish between the rich peasants and middle peasants, and not confiscate any of the middle peasants' land. For a long time, this policy was viewed askance by the Comintern as a 'rich peasant deviation'.

The concept of a rural base area, with workers' and peasants' political

power, was the fundamental premise of Mao's theory of people's war. To defend the land reform, the peasants had to arm themselves, and from the armed peasantry, the Red Army steadily extended its own ranks. But before returning to Mao's theory of people's war, there is the question of the other, less reliable ally of the proletariat, the 'middle' or national bourgeoisie.

The national bourgeoisie

As we have seen above, Mao had depicted the ambivalent and inconsistent character of the national bourgeoisie as early as 1926. The following year, fearing the rise of the workers and peasants, the national bourgeoisie threw in its lot with the compradors and landlords, represented by Chiang Kai-shek. But the situation changed again in 1931, with the Japanese occupation of the north-eastern provinces. The national bourgeoisie's anti-imperialism was roused anew, and it was therefore once again a potential ally of the proletariat.

In 1939 Mao characterised the national bourgeoisie in the following terms:

The national bourgeoisie is a class with a dual character. On the one hand it is oppressed by imperialism and fettered by feudalism and consequently is in contradiction with both of them. In this respect it constitutes one of the revolutionary forces. In the course of the Chinese revolution it has displayed a certain enthusiasm for fighting imperialism and the governments of bureaucrats and warlords.

But on the other hand, it lacks the courage to oppose imperialism and feudalism thoroughly because it is economically and politically flabby, and still has economic ties with imperialism and feudalism. This emerges very clearly when the people's revolutionary forces grow powerful . . .

The national bourgeoisie in China, which is mainly the middle bourgeoisie, has never really held political power but has been restricted by the reactionary policies of the big landlord class and big bourgeoisie which are in power, although it followed them in opposing the revolution in the period from 1927 to 1931. In the present war, it differs not only from the capitulationists of the big landlord class and big bourgeoisie but also from the big bourgeois die-hards, and so far has been a fairly good ally of ours. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to have a prudent policy towards the national bourgeoisie.

We should also note that, in the context of Japanese invasion, even the section of the comprador bourgeoisie that sided with the British and American imperialists found themselves objectively on the same side as the Chinese proletariat. Mao wrote:

In China, different sections of the comprador big bourgeoisie owe allegiance to different imperialist powers, so that when the contradictions among the latter become very acute and the revolution is directed mainly against one particular imperialist power, it becomes possible for the sections of the comprador class which serve other imperialist groupings to join the current anti-imperialist front to a certain extent and for a certain period.

'However', he warned, 'they will turn against the Chinese revolution the moment their masters do'.¹⁶

Anti-imperialist front

Mao Tse-tung's conception of the anti-imperialist United Front must be understood in the light of this assessment of the different sections of the Chinese bourgeoisie. The first United Front of 1924-1927, sponsored by the Comintern, had failed when the national bourgeoisie deserted. But this did not lead Mao to adopt the sectarian attitude towards the national bourgeoisie that prevailed in the CPC in the early 1930s, and which Trotsky and his followers elevated to the status of a 'principle'. In 1936, despite Chiang's massacres during the previous decade, the CPC was willing to enter into a second United Front with the KMT. Thus Chiang committed the KMT to resist Japan, and accepted the existence of the CPC's base area. The CPC modified its land policy from confiscating the land of the landlords to reducing rent and interest, and while maintaining its clear leadership position, gave representatives of the petty bourgeoisie, national bourgeoisie and even 'enlightened gentry' a representation in the political organisations of the base areas. The crucial difference from the first United Front of the 1920s was that now the CPC maintained its own armed forces and base areas, and in fact was the main force in the anti-Japanese struggle as a whole.

Even in the midst of war, Chiang resorted to treacherous actions against the CPC, at times causing substantial damage, but he was unable to prevent the Party from gradually extending its power. Moreover, the CPC constantly struggled within the United Front against the KMT's reactionary policies, insisting that the KMT should institute a general mobilisation, reform the government apparatus, introduce democracy, improve the people's livelihood, arm the people, and carry out a total war of resistance.

Mao's conception of the United Front is summed up in his maxim:

'If unity is sought through struggle, it will live; if unity is sought through yielding, it will perish'.¹⁷

Contradiction

I must now mention Mao's important philosophical essay 'On Contradiction', specifically written in 1937 at the beginning of the second United Front to clarify the issues involved in the change of tactics. 'On Contradiction' is based firmly on the philosophical writings of Engels and Lenin, but Mao applies and extends the principles of dialectical materialism into new areas on the basis of the experience gained during the Chinese revolution.

Two of Mao's arguments here are of particular importance. First, the relation between principal and secondary contradictions:

There are many contradictions in the process of development of a complex thing, and one of them is necessarily the principal contradiction whose existence and development determine or influence the existence and development of the other contradictions.¹⁸

Mao gives the following examples of this. First:

In capitalist society the two forces in contradiction, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, form the principal contradiction. The other contradictions, such as those between the remnant feudal class and the bourgeoisie, between the peasant petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie, between the proletariat and the peasant petty bourgeoisie, between the non-monopoly capitalists and the monopoly capitalists, between bourgeois democracy and bourgeois fascism, among the capitalist countries and between imperialism and the colonies, are all determined or influenced by this principal contradiction.

The second and more extensive example refers to the revolutionary struggle in China itself.

In a semi-colonial country such as China, the relationship between the principal contradiction and the non-principal contradictions presents a complicated picture.

When imperialism launches a war of aggression against such a country, all its various classes, except for some traitors, can temporarily unite in a national war against imperialism. At such a time, the contradiction between imperialism and the country concerned becomes the principal contradiction, while all the contradictions among the various classes within the country (including what was the principal contradiction, between the feudal system and the great masses of the people) are temporarily relegated to a secondary and subordinate position. So it was in China in the Opium War of 1840, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 and the Yi Ho Tuan War of 1900, and so it is now in the present Sino-Japanese War.

But in another situation, the contradictions change position. When imperialism carries on its oppression not by war, but by milder means – political,

economic and cultural – the ruling classes in semi-colonial countries capitulate to imperialism, and the two form an alliance for the joint oppression of the masses of the people. At such a time, the masses often resort to civil war against the alliance of imperialism and the feudal classes, while imperialism often employs indirect methods rather than direct action in helping the reactionaries in the semi-colonial countries to oppress the people, and thus the internal contradictions become particularly sharp. This is what happened in China in the Revolutionary War of 1911, the Revolutionary War of 1924-27, and the ten years of Agrarian Revolutionary War after 1927. Wars among the various reactionary ruling groups in the semi-colonial countries, *e.g.*, the wars among the warlords in China, fall into the same category.

When a revolutionary civil war develops to the point of threatening the very existence of imperialism and its running dogs, the domestic reactionaries, imperialism often adopts other methods in order to maintain its rule; it either tries to split the revolutionary front from within or sends armed forces to help the domestic reactionaries directly. At such a time, foreign imperialism and domestic reaction stand quite openly at one pole while the masses of the people stand at the other pole, thus forming the principal contradiction which determines or influences the development of the other contradictions. The assistance given by various capitalist countries to the Russian reactionaries after the October Revolution is an example of armed intervention. Chiang Kai-shek's betrayal in 1927 is an example of splitting the revolutionary front.

Mao concludes:

Hence, if in any process there are a number of contradictions, one of them must be the principal contradiction playing the leading and decisive role, while the rest occupy a secondary and subordinate position. Therefore, in studying any complex process in which there are two or more contradictions, we must devote every effort to finding its principal contradiction. Once this principal contradiction is grasped, all problems can be readily solved.¹⁹

The other aspect of 'On Contradiction' requiring mention is 'the place of antagonism in contradiction'. Mao holds that 'antagonism is one form, but not the only form, of the struggle of opposites'.

Contradiction and struggle are universal and absolute, but the methods of resolving contradictions, that is, the forms of struggle, differ according to the differences in the nature of the contradictions. Some contradictions are characterised by open antagonism, others are not. In accordance with the concrete development of things, some contradictions which were originally non-antagonistic develop into antagonistic ones, while others which were originally antagonistic develop into non-antagonistic ones.²⁰

For example

In human history, antagonism between classes exists as a particular manifestation of the struggle of opposites. Consider the contradiction between the exploiting and the exploited classes. Such contradictory classes coexist for a long time in the same society, be it slave society, feudal society or capitalist society, and they struggle with each other; but it is not until the contradiction between the two classes develops to a certain stage that it assumes the form of open antagonism and develops into revolution. The same holds for the transformation of peace into war in class society.²¹

Mao goes on to apply this conception to contradictions within the Communist Party itself.

As already mentioned, so long as classes exist, contradictions between correct and incorrect ideas in the Communist Party are reflections within the Party of class contradictions. At first, with regard to certain issues, such contradictions may not manifest themselves as antagonistic. But with the development of the class struggle, they may grow and become antagonistic. The history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union shows us that the contradictions between the correct thinking of Lenin and Stalin and the fallacious thinking of Trotsky, Bukharin and others did not at first manifest themselves in an antagonistic form, but that later they did develop into antagonism. There are similar cases in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. At first the contradictions between the correct thinking of many of our Party comrades and the fallacious thinking of Chen Tu-hsiu, Chang Kuo-tao and others also did not manifest themselves in an antagonistic form, but later they did develop into antagonism. At present the contradiction between correct and incorrect thinking in our Party does not manifest itself in an antagonistic form, and if comrades who have committed mistakes can correct them, it will not develop into antagonism. Therefore, the Party must on the one hand wage a serious struggle against erroneous thinking, and on the other give the comrades who have committed errors ample opportunity to wake up. This being the case, excessive struggle is obviously inappropriate. But if the people who have committed errors persist in them and aggravate them, there is the possibility that this contradiction will develop into antagonism.²²

This already foreshadows Mao's essay of 1957, 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People'. The difference between Mao's view of the desirability of keeping these contradictions from developing into antagonism, and that of Stalin, is already striking, particularly if we remember that 'On Contradiction' was written at the same time as the Moscow trials were in progress.

I have now dealt briefly with Mao's conception of the relation between the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal tasks of the democratic revolution, his analysis of the class forces in Chinese society, the role of the peasantry and the rural base area, proletarian hegemony in the democratic

revolution, and the question of the national bourgeoisie and the United Front. But the democratic revolution also saw the development of Mao's military theory of protracted people's war, and his conception of New Democracy. Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to go into Mao's military conceptions in detail, I shall just present their most critical features in schematic form.

Protracted war

It was in the War of Resistance against Japan that Mao's military theory became fully developed. In the short term, Mao held, Japan was a powerful imperialist power, while China was weak and backward. In the longer term, however, the contradictions of Japanese imperialism would lead to its decline, while China, fighting a just war against aggression, could build up its strength. The Chinese people should therefore fight a protracted war, not seeking rapid victories and decisive battles, but aiming rather to build up and defend the liberated areas on the basis of the fullest possible mobilisation of the people.

Guerilla warfare based on the peasantry was therefore a basic element in the Red Army's operations, as it had been since Ching-kang-shan. But Mao's innovation was to raise guerilla warfare to the level of strategy, by combining it with mobile warfare as part of an integrated plan. So as to concentrate sufficient forces against the enemy, it was necessary to fight on interior lines. The revolutionary forces had to lure the enemy in deep, not being afraid to deliberately abandon cities and districts; in this way the masses could be most fully involved in guerilla actions. Guerilla warfare was also employed extensively behind the enemy lines, even when mobile warfare became the primary form of fighting in the last period of the war. As far as the organisation of the army was concerned, Mao held that it had to be built first and foremost on a political basis. It could only succeed to the extent that it maintained full moral unity with the masses outside, and full unity between cadres and fighters internally. Not only did the army have to conduct political propaganda and agitation among the peasantry, but it also had to engage in production, so as to lessen the burden of its support. This is still the position of the People's Liberation Army in China today.

I quoted earlier on Lenin's dictum that the reason for differentiating between the stages of the revolution was precisely to accelerate its completion. In attacking imperialism and its domestic allies as the main enemy, Mao and the CPC were naturally preparing to carry forward the revolution from its democratic to its socialist stage. In this connection, Mao put forward, in 1939, his theory of New Democracy.

New Democracy

Since Chinese society is colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal, since the principal enemies of the Chinese revolution are imperialism and feudalism, since the tasks of the revolution are to overthrow these two enemies by means of a national and democratic revolution in which the bourgeoisie sometimes takes part, and since the edge of the revolution is directed against imperialism and feudalism and not against capitalism and capitalist private property in general even if the big bourgeoisie betrays the revolution and becomes its enemy – since all this is true, the character of the Chinese revolution at the present stage is not proletarian-socialist but bourgeois-democratic.

However, in present-day China the bourgeois-democratic revolution is no longer of the old general type, which is now obsolete, but one of a new special type. We call this type the new-democratic revolution and it is developing in all other colonial and semi-colonial countries as well as in China. The new-democratic revolution is part of the world proletarian-socialist revolution, for it resolutely opposes imperialism, *i.e.*, international capitalism. Politically, it strives for the joint dictatorship of the revolutionary classes over the imperialists, traitors and reactionaries, and opposes the transformation of Chinese society into a society under bourgeois dictatorship. Economically, it aims at the nationalisation of all the big enterprises and capital of the imperialists, traitors and reactionaries, and the distribution among the peasants of the land held by the landlords, while preserving private capitalist enterprise in general and not eliminating the rich-peasant economy. Thus, the new type of democratic revolution clears the way for capitalism on the one hand and creates the prerequisites for socialism on the other. The present stage of the Chinese revolution is a stage of transition between the abolition of the colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal society and the establishment of a socialist society, *i.e.*, it is a process of new-democratic revolution. This process, begun only after the First World War and the Russian October Revolution, started in China with the May 4th Movement of 1919. A new-democratic revolution is an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution of the broad masses of the people under the leadership of the proletariat. Chinese society can advance to socialism only through such a revolution; there is no other way.²³

Speaking of the 'relation between the bourgeois-democratic and proletarian-socialist revolution' in China, Mao stated:

It is not at all surprising but entirely to be expected that a capitalist economy will develop to a certain extent within Chinese society with the sweeping away of the obstacles to the development of capitalism after the victory of the revolution, since the purpose of the Chinese revolution at the present stage is to change the existing colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal state of society, *i.e.*, to strive for the completion of the new-democratic revolution. A certain degree of capitalist development will be an inevitable result of the victory of the democratic revolution in economically backward China. But that will be only one aspect of

the outcome of the Chinese revolution and not the whole picture. The whole picture will show the development of socialist as well as capitalist factors. What will the socialist factors be? The increasing relative importance of the proletariat and the Communist Party among the political forces in the country; leadership by the proletariat and the Communist Party which the peasantry, intelligentsia and the urban petty bourgeoisie already accept or are likely to accept; and the state sector of the economy owned by the democratic republic, and the co-operative sector of the economy owned by the working people. All these will be socialist factors. With the addition of a favourable international environment, these factors render it highly probable that China's bourgeois-democratic revolution will ultimately avoid a capitalist future and enjoy a socialist future.²⁴

In 1949, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the Chinese people finally liberated the country from imperialism; the expropriation of foreign and comprador capital, and the land reform, rapidly brought to a close the new-democratic stage of the revolution. As Mao had anticipated, the national bourgeoisie were kept firmly under control in China, and by gradual steps, their capital was taken over by the state. The rapid development of co-operation in the countryside from 1952 to the formation of communes in 1958 blocked the way to private capital in agriculture.

2: The socialist revolution

In the first part of this essay I sought to present Mao Tse-tung's theory and practice of the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution in a colonial and semi-colonial situation, and his theory of its transition under the leadership of the proletariat from the democratic to the socialist stage. The example set by Mao in China has since proved applicable – of course with national variations – to several other countries which have struggled successfully against imperialism, and can be said to have general significance for the anti-imperialist struggle, on which the whole future of the human race depends. This achievement would alone account for Mao's position as the most important of Lenin's successors. But in his last two decades Mao went further. In the practice of the *socialist* revolution in China he guided the proletarian movement forward to a new and historically unprecedented stage that has significance for *all* countries, and it is this above all that places Mao's achievement alongside the work of Marx and Lenin themselves in the development of Marxist thought.

The construction of socialism in a poor and backward country such as China faced and still faces certain problems specific to the Third World – in particular the intense contradictions between town and country, industry and agriculture. But specific problems of this kind have been raised in China in the context of a general and universal problem – the transition from capitalism to communism in general – and it is naturally on this aspect that I shall concentrate.

Communism is not just an economic system. Mao expressed the ultimate aim of the proletarian revolution very well when he wrote:

The struggle of the proletariat and the revolutionary people to change the world comprises the fulfilment of the following tasks: to change the objective world and, at the same time, their own subjective world – to change their cognitive ability and change the relations between the subjective and the objective world . . . The epoch of world communism will be reached when all mankind voluntarily and consciously changes itself and the world.²⁵

It is not simply that the ideological superstructure has to be changed as well as the economic base. In communist society, the very relationship of base and superstructure is different from that under capitalism. Thus labour, in Marx's phrase, must be transformed from 'just a means of keeping alive', *i.e.* a purely economic process, into 'a vital need', a free and

conscious act.²⁶ Lenin expressed this in the following words; referring to the voluntary labour of the Communist *subbotniks* in the early days of the Russian revolution:

Communism begins when the rank-and-file workers display an enthusiastic concern that is undaunted by arduous toil to increase the productivity of labour, husband every *pod* of grain, coal, iron and other products, which do not accrue to the workers personally or to their 'close' kith and kin, but to their 'distant' kith and kin, *i.e.* to society as a whole, to tens and hundreds of millions of people united first in one socialist state and then in a union of Soviet republics.²⁷

In fact, it is only through changing the ideological superstructure in this way that the working class can establish communism in place of capitalism, for otherwise, even if the means of production have been legally 'nationalised' by a workers' state, the reality of the productive process will remain one of separation between enterprises, with commodity relations between them, and separation also between those who labour and those who manage and control, and this will in time undermine even the political power with which the working class started out.

Revolution and production

This may be an appropriate place to mention the criticism sometimes made of Mao as a Marxist that he 'exaggerates the subjective factor'. For example, one of the major battles within the CPC in the 1950s, between Mao Tse-tung and Liu Shao-chi, was whether agricultural collectivisation should precede or follow a certain level of mechanisation. In the Cultural Revolution, the slogan was raised: 'grasp revolution and promote production', *i.e.* promote production by means of revolutionary ideology. A key theoretical passage on this subject is in Mao's 'On Contradiction'. Mao writes here of how, in any contradiction between two united opposites, the principal or dominant aspect changes position in the course of development.

Some people think that this is not true of certain contradictions. For instance, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the productive forces are the principal aspect; in the contradiction between theory and practice, practice is the principal aspect; in the contradiction between the economic base and the superstructure, the economic base is the principal aspect; and there is no change in their respective positions. This is the mechanical materialist conception, not the dialectical materialist conception. True, the

productive forces, practice and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role; whoever denies this is not a materialist. But it must also be admitted that in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role. When it is impossible for the productive forces to develop without a change in the relations of production, then the change in the relations of production plays the principal and decisive role. The creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role in those times of which Lenin said, 'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement'. When a task, no matter which, has to be performed, but there is as yet no guiding line, method, plan or policy, the principal and decisive thing is to decide on a guiding line, method, plan or policy. When the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become principal and decisive. Are we going against materialism when we say this? No. The reason is that while we recognise that in the general development of history the material determines the mental and social being determines social consciousness, we also – and indeed must – recognise the reaction of mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being and of the superstructure on the economic base. This does not go against materialism; on the contrary, it avoids mechanical materialism and firmly upholds dialectical materialism.²⁸

The economic achievements of China during and after the Cultural Revolution demonstrate this relationship in practice. It is the very nature of the communist organisation of labour that proletarian politics and ideology must be in command. It is to Mao's credit as a Marxist that he has always insisted that: 'Of all things in the world, people are the most precious. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, so long as there are people, every kind of miracle can be performed'²⁹; and that 'the masses have boundless creative power'.³⁰

This is a development of Marx's own thesis, in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, that 'Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself'.³¹

The transitional stage

It is particularly because the advance towards communism depends on the proletariat and the revolutionary people changing the ideological superstructure – 'their own subjective world' – that in socialist society, *i.e.* the transitional stage between the expropriation of the capitalist class and the achievement of communism, the class struggle does not die out, but continues. Lenin had already held that 'The dictatorship of the proletariat is a persistent struggle – sanguinary and bloodless, military and economic, educational and administrative – against the forces and

traditions of the old society. The force of habit of millions and tens of millions is a most terrible force'.³² Mao wrote in 1957 in 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People':

The class struggle is by no means over. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the class struggle between the different political forces, and the class struggle in the ideological field between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will continue to be long and tortuous and at times will even become very acute. The proletariat seeks to transform the world according to its own world outlook, and so does the bourgeoisie. In this respect, the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, is still not really settled.³³

A dictatorship of the proletariat such as was established in China in 1949 can only be achieved under the leadership of a communist party, organised on the basis of democratic centralism and guided by Marxist-Leninist ideology. Lenin even went as far as to say that 'whoever in the least weakens the iron discipline of the party of the proletariat (especially during its dictatorship) actually aids the bourgeoisie against the proletariat'.³⁴ But this in itself contains a contradiction, in fact a central contradiction of socialist society. For even if the great majority of members of such a party are workers and peasants in origin, their very function as leaders (particularly of those who must devote themselves more or less full-time to state, industrial and agricultural administration) tends to divorce them from the masses and bring them into contact with the old managerial elite of the overthrown class society. In this way you can arrive at a restoration of capitalism such as occurred in the Soviet Union.

The mass line

It is this central contradiction of socialist society to which Mao Tse-tung indicated the solution theoretically and practically, in a series of steps culminating in the Cultural Revolution. The first step was the *mass line*, developed already during the democratic stage of the Chinese revolution. A celebrated formulation of this principle by Mao is in his article of June 1943, 'Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership':

In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily 'from the masses, to the masses'. This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such

action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge.³⁵

In itself this formulation was not entirely novel, and Lenin for example had written in similar terms in 1913.³⁶ Yet the painstaking care with which this method has always been applied in the CPC under Mao Tse-tung's leadership, from the struggle in Ching kangshan to the Cultural Revolution and beyond, is unprecedented. This can be seen vividly documented in the account given by William Hinton in *Fanshen* of the process of land reform in a single village: the investigations made by the cadres from the PLA, the arousal of the masses to struggle for themselves, the guidelines drawn up for the land reform, the problems that arose when these were applied, the self-criticisms made by the cadres, and the revised guidelines. The historical origins of this mass line, which is so fundamentally a part of concrete CPC practice, can be traced to the relationship between the Party and the peasantry in the rural base areas. The principles according to which the Party mobilised the peasantry had to be tested there and then on the spot, not in twenty years time after the seizure of state power. The protracted nature of the revolutionary process in China thus strengthened enormously the bonds between the Party and the masses, as contrasted with the rather commandist style of work that is noticeable in the Bolshevik party from its earliest days in power.

In fact, the mass line, as applied by the CPC, had already led in the pre-Liberation period to a phenomenon that had no precedent in Bolshevik practice – the encouragement by the Party of criticism and even dismissal of its cadres by the masses. In 1948, for example, in connection with the land reform movement in the liberated areas, Mao wrote:

We must criticise and struggle with certain cadres and Party members, who have committed serious mistakes, and certain bad elements among the masses of workers and peasants. In such criticism and struggle we should persuade the masses to adopt correct methods and forms and to refrain from rough actions. This is one side of the matter. The other side is that these cadres, Party members and bad elements should be made to pledge that they will not retaliate against the masses. It should be announced that the masses not only have the right to criticise them freely but also have the right to dismiss them from their posts when necessary, or to propose their dismissal, or to propose their expulsion from the Party and even to hand the worst elements over to the people's courts for trial and punishment.³⁷

Mao's conception of the mass line is closely tied in with that of

contradictions among the people and the correct method of handling them. And Mao already recognised in his 1957 essay that 'There are still certain contradictions between the government and the people', including 'the contradiction arising from the bureaucratic style of work of certain government workers in their relations with the masses'.³⁸ In order to keep such contradictions from becoming antagonistic, the Party cadres had to live modestly, and practise self-criticism aided by the criticism of the masses outside the Party. The object of this criticism was not to dismiss all cadres who had made mistakes, but wherever possible to 'cure the sickness to save the patient'. This is the meaning of Mao's formula: 'unity, criticism and self-criticism, unity'.

After Krushchev's attack on Stalin at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956, the Central Committee of the CPC, in a statement 'On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', referred to the mass line as the way they had developed to deal with 'subjectivism in methods of leadership'. (New China News Agency 5th April, 1956, p.6.)

Preventing the restoration of capitalism

A further step towards the solution of this contradiction was taken by Mao Tse-tung in response to the complete degeneration of socialism in the Soviet Union under Krushchev – 'the biggest lesson in the history of the dictatorship of the proletariat'. In the context of the Polemic on the General Line of 1963-64, the CPC in an article 'On Krushchev's Phoney Communism and its Lessons for the World', apparently drafted by Mao himself, summarised a set of theories and policies which Mao had formulated in response to the problem: How can the restoration of capitalism be prevented? In addition to points already mentioned (distinguishing different forms of contradiction and the mass line) other important ideas were: 'It is necessary to build up a large detachment of working-class intellectuals who serve socialism and who are both "red and expert"'; 'it is necessary to maintain the system of cadre participation in collective productive labour'; that 'the system of high salaries for a small number of people should never be applied'; and that 'the people's public security organs must always be under the leadership of the Party of the proletariat and under the supervision of the mass of the people'.³⁹

The third and conclusive step in preventing the restoration of capitalism was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. It had been preceded by earlier rectification campaigns going back to 1942 in Yenan, and by the Socialist Education Movement of 1962-65, but these were always within the framework of ultimate control by the Party. As Mao put it in February 1967:

In the past we waged struggles in rural areas, in factories, in the cultural field, and we carried out the socialist education movement. But all this failed to solve the problem because we did not find a form, a method, to arouse the broad masses to expose our dark aspect openly, in an all-round way and from below.⁴⁰

This form was finally found with the Cultural Revolution launched by Mao in 1966, which, though it had achieved its immediate objectives by 1969, was still considered as continuing in a different form at the time of Mao's death.

In April 1968, Mao defined the essence of the Cultural Revolution in the following terms:

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is in essence a great political revolution under socialist conditions by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes. It is the continuation of the long struggle against the Kuomintang reactionaries waged by the CPC and the broad revolutionary masses under its leadership. It is the continuation of the struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie.⁴¹

The crucial thing to bear in mind in understanding the Cultural Revolution is that the term 'revolution' is not just a metaphor; it was precisely a real revolution. It led to a decisive shift in political power between the two basic classes in modern society. But of course, taking place in a country which had already made some progress along the socialist road and in which political power was exercised by the Communist Party as the representative of the labouring masses, it was a revolution of a kind unprecedented in history.

Struggle – criticism – transformation

The basic slogan of the Cultural Revolution came to be summarised as 'struggle-criticism-transformation'. This was taken from Mao's words in the 16-point decision (known as the Sixteen Articles) of August 1966, passed by the Central Committee only after Mao had used his personal prestige to detonate a mass movement which was now already under way.

At present, our objective is to *struggle* against and overthrow those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road, to *criticise* and repudiate the reactionary bourgeois academic 'authorities' and the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes and to *transform* education, literature and art and all other parts of the superstructure not in correspondence with the socialist economic base, so as to facilitate the consolidation and development of the socialist system.⁴²

To deal with the struggle aspect first, Mao indicated the bureaucratised Party cadres who had become divorced from the masses, had won control of the Party apparatus and were tending to develop into a privileged elite on Soviet lines as the prime target of attack. In the Sixteen Articles Mao goes on to ask the same question he had asked in 1926: 'Who are our enemies? Who are our friends?' 'The main target of the present movement', *i.e.* the enemies, were 'those within the Party who are in authority and are taking the capitalist road' (p.5). In order to struggle successfully against the bureaucrats, it was necessary to arouse the masses boldly:

The masses of the workers, peasants, soldiers, revolutionary intellectuals and revolutionary cadres form the main force in this great cultural revolution. Large numbers of revolutionary young people, previously unknown, have become courageous and daring pathbreakers. They are vigorous in action and intelligent. Through the media of big-character posters and great debates, they argue things out, expose and criticise thoroughly, and launch resolute attacks on the open and hidden representatives of the bourgeoisie. In such a great revolutionary movement, it is hardly avoidable that they should show shortcomings of one kind or another; however, their general revolutionary orientation has been correct from the beginning. This is the main current in the great proletarian cultural revolution. It is the general direction along which this revolution continues to advance . . .

The outcome of this great cultural revolution will be determined by whether or not the Party leadership dares boldly to arouse the masses.

The mass struggles of the Cultural Revolution, in schools and colleges, in factories, communes and municipalities, are now well documented in numerous English language books and reports. These struggles were often violent and sometimes involved the use of arms, despite Mao's injunctions to the contrary. But the issue of the Cultural Revolution was resolved without civil war; and this was possible because the capitalist roaders in China had not yet reached the stage of consolidating their position as a new ruling class. Mao therefore said that there were only a 'small number of anti-Party, anti-socialist Rightists' (p.8), who 'must be fully exposed, refuted, overthrown and completely discredited and their influence eliminated'. Even these 'should be given the chance to turn over a new leaf' (p.8).

Moreover, a strict distinction must be made between the two different types of contradiction: those among the people and those between ourselves and the enemy'. (p.6) And 'the strictest care should be taken to distinguish between the anti-Party, anti-socialist Rightists, and those who support the Party and socialism but have said or done something wrong or have written some bad articles or other works'. (p.6) Here again, as in the

land reform of the 1930s and in China's foreign policy today, the principle at work is 'Unite the Many, Defeat the Few'.

Against the new class

The Cultural Revolution was not simply a struggle *within* the Party, or even a rectification movement in which the Party invited the masses to join and criticise certain bad cadres. On the other hand, it was not a struggle of the masses against the Party, as would be necessary in a country such as the Soviet Union. It was something in between the two: a struggle waged by the masses and that section of the Party leadership and cadres who aligned themselves with the masses, against the Party apparatus and that section of cadres who were developing into a new class, its aim being to reform the majority of these but overthrow the irredeemable hard core.

Within the masses, although the students and youth had been the first to rise up (Mao saw this as 'in accordance with the laws of revolutionary development'⁴³) from the 1967 January storm in Shanghai onwards, the industrial working class emerged as the main force of the Cultural Revolution. On 14th August, 1969, for example, Mao explicitly instructed that 'The leading role of the working class in the Cultural Revolution and all fields of work should be developed'.⁴⁴

It is necessary to stress the question of power, of class power, which lay at the heart of the Cultural Revolution, both because it is often denied by certain so-called Marxists in Britain and because Mao Tse-tung himself insisted on it. 'The basic problem of a revolution is the problem of political power. The possession of political power means the possession of everything; the loss of it means the loss of everything'.⁴⁵

After complex twists and turns, the new relations of power came to be embodied, via the formation of 'grand alliances' of the revolutionary mass organisations, in 'Revolutionary Committees' based at first on the three-in-one combination of new activists from the masses, those old cadres who had been tried and tested by the masses, and army men. These last were called upon by Mao to intervene politically – but not militarily – to support the Left, and played an important role in helping to achieve the grand alliances, but gradually withdrew again from the political arena once the new revolutionary authorities were consolidated.

The principle of three-in-one combination was subsequently reformulated as a combination of old, middle-aged and young people, but it must also be remembered that since the Cultural Revolution, all full-time cadres must regularly spend a substantial proportion of their time in ordinary manual labour.

These new organs of political power are of course only a means to an end. And the end is 'to use the new ideas, culture, customs and habits of the proletariat to change the mental outlook of the whole of society', for the proletariat 'to transform education, literature, art and all other parts of the superstructure not in correspondence with the socialist economic base, so as to facilitate the consolidation and development of the socialist systems'.⁴⁶

The great increase in political consciousness at all levels has made possible certain very significant changes in the organisation of the Party, as embodied in the new Party constitution adopted at the Tenth Congress in August 1973. Mao had asserted during the Cultural Revolution that 'going against the tide is a Marxist-Leninist principle', and the Party constitution specifies that 'comrades throughout the Party must have the revolutionary spirit of daring to go against the tide'.⁴⁷ On relations within the Party and between the Party and the masses, the constitution says:

Leading bodies of the Party at all levels shall regularly report on their work to congresses or general membership meetings, constantly listen to the opinions of the masses both inside and outside the Party and accept their supervision. Party members have the right to criticise organisations and leading members of the Party at all levels and make proposals to them . . . It is absolutely impermissible to suppress criticism and to retaliate. It is essential to create a political situation in which there are both centralism and democracy, both discipline and freedom, both unity of will and personal ease of mind and liveliness'.⁴⁸

With the same concern in mind, Mao insisted in the new state constitution adopted by the 4th National People's Congress in January 1975 that the freedom to strike be explicitly added.

The transformations initiated during the Cultural Revolution have now been well documented, and this is not the place to go into them in detail. Suffice it to say that in all fields of social relations – industry, agriculture, education, culture, the family, etc. – the mobilisation of the masses of workers and peasants produced major changes. Taken together, these have brought China one further big stride forward, away from the past of oppression and exploitation, and towards the communist future. It is through the Cultural Revolution that Chinese society decisively emerged as the most advanced outpost of humanity today in its struggle to abolish class society, and consequently as a model for the peoples of all countries. Still more important, the process of change has itself become permanent. This is perhaps the authentic meaning of Marx's often abused term 'permanent revolution'. The social patterns of China after the Cultural Revolution are in no way rigid and static, and change depends to a large

extent on local initiative and experiment. In the context of the Cultural Revolution, there has been a great movement at all levels to study Marxism-Leninism – by no means simply the ‘Quotations’ – and this, together with their own experience, has armed the Chinese masses with knowledge of how to make revolution, and confidence in their own collective powers.

Between Capitalism and Communism

Like all great struggles, the Cultural Revolution had its complexities. In the struggle against ultra-left tendencies which sought to destroy Party organisation altogether, and against Lin Piao, who sought to replace the leading role of the Party with a system of military dictatorship, a section of former ‘capitalist roaders’ who had supposedly seen the error of their ways, returned to positions of power, and it is clear that the ‘two-line’ struggle between the road of continued revolution and the road of revisionism is by no means over. As Mao put it at the time of the Lin Piao affair in 1971:

We have been singing *The Internationale* for fifty years, and there have been ten occasions on which someone in our Party worked for a split. As I see it, another ten, twenty or thirty such occasions may arise. Don’t you believe this? Well, if you don’t, I do anyway. There will be no more struggles with the realisation of communism? That’s not what I believe. There will be struggles even then, although they will be struggles between the new and the old, between what is correct and what is wrong. Even tens of thousands of years from now, what is wrong won’t pass, it won’t stand up.⁴⁹

However, Mao also expressed his confidence that the revolutionary line would always win out in the last analysis:

In China, after the emperor was overthrown in 1911, no reactionary was able to stay long in power. The longest was only twenty years (Chiang Kai-shek), but he was also toppled once the people rose in revolt. Chiang Kai-shek climbed to power by taking advantage of Sun Yat-sen’s trust in him . . . In those twenty years, however, he never achieved unification. There occurred the war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, the wars between the Kuomintang and the various warlord cliques, the Sino-Japanese war and, finally, the four-year large-scale civil war, which sent him scampering to a cluster of islands. If the Rightists were to stage an anti-Communist coup d’etat in China, I am sure they would have no peace either and their rule would most probably be short-lived, because it would never be tolerated by the revolutionaries who represent the interests of the people constituting more than 90 per cent of the population . . . The conclusion is still the two oft-repeated sentences: The future is bright; the road is tortuous.⁵⁰

‘The future is bright; the road is tortuous’. This dialectical formula that Mao has so frequently used expresses very well the spirit of Marxism. Social reality is refractory and not easy to change, but revolutionaries, too, with the people on their side, persevere stubbornly, and, like the foolish old man who tried to remove mountains, their cause will ultimately prevail. Even in old age, and with sixty years of revolutionary struggle behind him, Mao was far from resting on his laurels, or mistaking the immense advances that China has made for the goals that are still ahead. As contrasted to Stalin’s use of the term, and a whole false tradition in the workers’ movement, Mao Tse-tung reiterated in his final years that ‘socialism’ was not the achieved new society, but an unstable transition phase still poised between capitalism and communism:

In a word, China is a socialist country. Before liberation she was much the same as capitalism. Even now she practises an eight-grade wage system, distribution to each according to his work and exchange by means of money, which are scarcely different from those in the old society. What is different is that the system of ownership has changed.⁵¹

With this and other similar ‘instructions’, Mao launched the movement to study the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat in early 1975. Still true as a die to the class standpoint of the proletariat, Mao stressed not how far China had come, but how far there was still to go in order to reach the communist goal. Prepared by the Cultural Revolution and the mass theoretical study that this brought in its wake, the Chinese people are certainly well placed to continue the struggle for communism along the road that Mao has signposted for them. But it is here in particular that Mao would dissent from the effusive appreciations of his life that were published after his death right across the bourgeois world. Under pressure of events, the bourgeoisie can admit that there has been class struggle, and that only in this way have the masses made progress. What they will not see is that we are not at the end of human history, but scarcely yet at its true beginning.

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