

TEXT 7

STUDY THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE CONFUCIAN AND LEGALIST SCHOOLS

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The history of the struggle between the Confucian and Legalist schools and of class struggle as a whole is now being extensively studied by China's workers, peasants and soldiers, revolutionary cadres and revolutionary intellectuals. Such a wide-ranging mobilization of the masses for studying and summing up the experience and lessons of class struggle in the past is a matter of great practical and far-reaching historical significance.

Making the Past Serve the Present

Discussing the proletariat's historical task of preventing capitalist restoration after seizing political power, Lenin pointed out: **"We do not know whether or not our victory will be followed by temporary periods of reaction and the victory of the counter-revolution—there is nothing impossible in that—and therefore, after our victory, we shall build a 'triple line of trenches' against such a contingency."** (*Revision of the Party Programme.*) To successfully carry out the historical mission entrusted to the proletarian dictatorship and win victory in the prolonged and complicated class struggle, the proletariat not only should be adept at accumulating experience through its own struggles, but should study past class struggle and two-line struggle and the struggle between revolution and reaction and between restoration and counter-restoration in the periods of big social change, and use the Marxist method to make a critical summing up so as to accumulate experience and draw lessons and make the past serve the present.

The development of Chinese history has its own characteristics. Because the Chinese bourgeoisie living in a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society was extremely weak economically and politically, the task of leading the bourgeois democratic revolution historically fell on the shoulders of the proletariat. Led by the Chinese Communist Party headed by Chairman Mao, the Chinese people have thoroughly carried

Peking Review #2, January 10, 1975. (Slightly abridged translation of an article in *Hong-qi [Red Flag]* #10, 1974.)

out the bourgeois democratic revolution and, following this, carried on the revolution to the socialist stage and founded the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Except for the revolution led by the proletariat, only the replacement of the slave system by the feudal system actually constituted a social change in China's history which saw the dictatorship of one class replaced by that of another class in its full sense. The struggle between the Confucian and Legalist lines took place during that social change. The struggle between worshipping the Confucian school and opposing the Legalist school on the one hand and between worshipping the Legalist school and opposing the Confucian school on the other hand never ceased throughout feudal society, and this struggle still has its influence up to the present time.

All the enemies of the proletarian dictatorship have taken the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius as their tool for restoring capitalism in China. The chieftains of the opportunist lines in our Party all worshipped the Confucian school and opposed the Legalist school. The renegade and traitor Lin Piao even went so far as to call Confucius and Mencius the "former sages" and Marx and Lenin the "later sages," and did all he could to peddle the idea that "both the former and later sages follow the same principles." To adhere to Marxism and oppose revisionism, we must thoroughly criticize this reactionary view and the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius.

In the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States Periods (770-221 B.C.) when the feudal system was replacing the slave system in China, the Legalists—the political and ideological representatives of the new emerging landlord class—in the course of seizing and consolidating political power waged prolonged and sharp struggles against the declining slave-owning class and its political and ideological representatives, the Confucianists. More than 130 years had elapsed from the time Shang Yang (?-338 B.C.) carried out reforms in the State of Chin to 221 B.C. when Chin Shih Huang unified China. If we reckon from the time when the State of Lu began to collect the land tax*, it was more than 370 years. During those centuries the newly rising landlord class seized and then lost political power many times. The unification of China by Chin Shih Huang did not spell the end of struggle. From the founding of the Chin Dynasty to the fall of the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-8 A.D.), the struggle continued unabated for nearly 250 years between restoration and counter-restoration although the restorationist forces of the slave-owners were weakened step by step.

*This refers to the system of collecting a tax based on land area first introduced in the 15th year of Duke Hsuan in the State of Lu, or 594 B.C. Its adoption signified China's transition from slavery to feudalism in land ownership.

The struggles between revolution and reaction and between restoration and counter-restoration in that entire era (including open and covert, bloody and bloodless, political and economic, and military and cultural struggles) have provided us with extremely rich experience and lessons in class struggle and the two-line struggle. The experience and lessons have a vivid and profound nature special to the history of Chinese society. Communists and the working masses who are making revolution in China must sum them up from the Marxist viewpoint and make them serve the current struggle in our socialist revolution and construction.

Putting the Line First

The history of the struggle between the Confucian and Legalist schools tells us that a correct line does not appear spontaneously but emerges and develops in the course of struggle. In a deep-going social change, the progressive class can further develop and perfect its revolutionary line and make good preparations for the next battle only through criticizing the reactionary line and trend of thinking and summing up the experiences and lessons in class struggle. The rising landlord class started its full-scale attack in the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) and a high tide of reform swept the ducal states. The thoroughness of Shang Yang's reform shocked these states.

A sharp struggle ensued between the Confucian and Legalist lines around the question of negating or affirming this social change. Flaunting the banner of "speaking in the interests of the people," Mencius (390-305 B.C.), a representative of the Confucian school, came out with the theory peddling "benevolent rule" in an attempt to negate and overthrow the political power of the new emerging landlord class and restore the dictatorship of the slave-owners. (See "Mencius—a Trumpeter for Restoring the Slave System," *Peking Review*, No. 37, 1974.) Hsun Kuang (c. 313-238 B.C.) and Han Fei (c. 280-233 B.C.), representatives of the Legalist school, firmly refuted Mencius' absurd theory of "benevolent rule." They pointed out that the so-called "benevolence and righteousness" merely aimed at "deceiving and keeping the people ignorant" and was a restorationist theory opposing reform and change; they thus enthusiastically defended reform in the various states. This debate covered a wide field involving social and political questions as well as world outlook, and it helped further develop and perfect the Legalist line. Chin Shih Huang resolutely put the Legalist line into practice and founded the first unified feudal state under centralized authority. His victory over the six other states and in unifying the country was not only a military victory but a direct result

of the Legalists' criticism of the Confucian doctrines in the big debate.

The struggle between restoration and counter-restoration was still very sharp after the founding of the Chin Dynasty. (See "Struggle Between Restoration and Counter-Restoration in the Course of Founding the Chin Dynasty," *Peking Review*, Nos. 17 and 18, 1974.) Whether the upcoming landlord class could hold political power or not hinged on whether it could guarantee the continual implementation of the Legalist line. In this respect, the Chin Dynasty had both experiences of success and lessons of failure. Not willing to quit the stage of history of its own accord, the overthrown slave-owning class attacked the present with the past and launched one attack after another against the Chin Dynasty, doing whatever it could to change Chin Shih Huang's Legalist line and subvert the dictatorship of the newly rising landlord class. Chin Shih Huang firmly adopted such revolutionary measures as "burning books and burying Confucian scholars alive" (see "Clarifying 'Burning Books and Burying Confucian Scholars Alive,'" *Peking Review*, No. 19, 1974), smashed the attacks by the slave-owners' restorationist forces, adhered to the centralized system of prefectures and counties and persisted in the Legalist line.

But, precisely as Chairman Mao has profoundly summed up, **"except for the revolution which replaced primitive communes by slavery, that is, a system of non-exploitation by one of exploitation, all revolutions ended in the replacement of one system of exploitation by another, and it was neither necessary nor possible for them to do a thorough job in suppressing counter-revolutionaries."** (Introductory note to "Material on the Hu Feng Counter-Revolutionary Clique.") Chin Shih Huang was no exception. When he became rather complacent about peace and order in the country, Chao Kao (?-207 B.C.), a representative of the slave-owners' restorationist forces, sneaked into the core of the Chin court under the Legalist cloak and followed the "tactics of undermining from within" against the landlord class' political power. No sooner had Chin Shih Huang died than Chao Kao launched a counter-revolutionary coup d'état, substituted the reactionary Confucian line for the former's Legalist line, unloosed bloody class revenge against the political representatives of the landlord class and spared no effort to foster the slave-owners' restorationist forces.

The history of this period showed that after the landlord class seized political power, both the open and hidden struggles waged by the slave-owners' restorationist forces were all aimed at changing the Legalist line followed by the central authorities. Once the line was changed, the door would be open to restoration. After seizing state power, therefore, the revolutionary classes must give first place to the question of line and maintain high vigilance against the reactionary classes' intrigues and

conspiracies to change the revolutionary line. Bearing in mind this experience and lesson of class struggle gained from the history of the struggle between the Confucian and Legalist schools helps us understand and persist in Chairman Mao's teachings that **“the correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything”** and **“practise Marxism, and not revisionism; unite, and don't split; be open and aboveboard, and don't intrigue and conspire.”**

Relying on the Masses

The statesmen of the landlord class were in a quandary after Chao Kao usurped power. But a new situation arose immediately after the outbreak of a peasant uprising. While handing out blows to the rule of the landlord class, the peasant uprising army led by Chen Sheng and Wu Kuang (see *“Working People's Struggle Against Confucius in Chinese History,” Peking Review*, No. 13, 1974) drove Chao Kao's restorationist political power into the grave in less than three years. This proved that the ascending landlord class could not carry the struggle against restoration through to the end with its own forces. The masses of the people were the main force in fighting against restoration. As the new emerging landlord class after all was an exploiting class and constituted a minority in society, it was in an antagonistic position with regard to the masses of peasants and naturally could not really rely on the masses to struggle against restoration. This was precisely the inevitable weakness of its political power.

In summing up the historical experience of the bourgeois revolution, Engels pointed out: **Even the most splendid achievements of the bourgeoisie in 17th century England and 18th century France were not made by it, but by the common masses, that is, the workers and peasants.** (*“Crisis” in Prussia.*) Similarly, the main force against the restoration of slavery in the big social change which saw feudalism replacing slavery was also the masses of peasants and those slaves who had not yet become peasants. This was decided by their class status, because once the slave system was restored, it meant first of all the return of the peasants to the extremely miserable status of slaves again. Without the forces of the masses, no revolution or counter-restorationist struggle in the past could be accomplished.

The proletarian dictatorship is the dictatorship of the overwhelming majority of people over the small number of exploiters. The proletariat can and must rely on and unite with the working people, unite with all the forces that can be united with and smash the class enemy's restorationist intrigues. Chairman Mao's theses that **“direct reliance on the revolutionary masses is a basic principle of the Communist Party”** and

“a line or a viewpoint must be explained constantly and repeatedly. It won't do to explain them only to a few people; they must be made known to the broad revolutionary masses” point out the great significance of relying on the forces of the masses and continuously consolidating the proletarian dictatorship.

Prolonged and Complicated Nature of Struggle

The great peasant uprising at the end of the Chin Dynasty swept away the slave-owners' restorationist forces. It was on this basis that the Western Han Dynasty of the new emerging landlord class came into being. However, the declining slave-owning class' strength was still bigger than that of the newly rising landlord class in certain fields, and the slave-owners' experience of struggle in certain respects was richer than that of statesmen of the new emerging landlord class. The slave-owners were sure to use these to pit their strength again and again against the landlord class that was coming up.

Taking advantage of the economic difficulties in the early days of the Western Han Dynasty, a group of big handicraft and commercial slave-owners hoarded goods and sent prices up, and they vied with the landlord class to seize land and labour power, undermining that feudal society's economic base. At the same time, these slave-owners colluded with conservatives in the landlord class (local forces that controlled certain places and had their own armies) to turn some areas into independent states. They gathered together a large number of Confucian scholars to create public opinion for restoration in the ideological realm and used their military forces to stage armed rebellions. They also often colluded with the slave-owning aristocrats of Hsiung Nu* in Chinese territory in an attempt to subvert the centralized Western Han Dynasty of the landlord class by attacking it from both sides. All this made the counter-restorationist struggle in that dynasty a prolonged, complicated and arduous one. Sharp struggles were fought on these fronts in the early and middle periods of the Western Han Dynasty. The landlord class' centralized dictatorship became stable only after Emperor Ching of Han (whose name was Liu Chi and was on the throne from 156 to 141 B.C.) had put down the “rebellion of Wu, Chu and five other states” (see note on page 22 in *Peking Review*, No. 18, 1974) and Emperor Wu of Han (whose name was Liu Cheh and was on the throne from 140 to 87 B.C.) had launched an all-round counter-attack against the slave-owning merchants and had triumphed in the war against the Hsiung Nu.

*A nationality in the northern part of China in the Western Han Dynasty.

This showed that even in a social change whereby one exploiting system replaced another, the struggle between restoration and counter-restoration was of long duration and complicated and took place in every single field. As long as the overthrown class has some strength, it will always attempt a restoration. This law of class struggle will never change. Chairman Mao said in 1955: **“If to this day representatives of the Royalists are found in the French bourgeois National Assembly, then it is highly probable that years after the final elimination of all exploiting classes from the face of the earth, representatives of the Chiang Kai-shek dynasty will remain active here and there. The worst diehards among them will never admit defeat.”** (Introductory note to the “Third Batch of Material on the Hu Feng Counter-Revolutionary Clique.”) In our study of the history of struggle between the Confucian and Legalist schools, we get a deeper understanding when we restudy this scientific summing up of historical experience by Chairman Mao. Never for a moment should the revolutionary classes and people forget that the enemy still exists in the world.

Need for a Leading Group Adhering to the Correct Line

The Western Han Dynasty was able to win victories in the struggle against restoration in its early and middle periods because it persisted in the Legalist line. The implementation of this line was interrupted after the death of Chin Shih Huang. But following the death of the first ruler of the Han Dynasty Emperor Kao Tsu (whose name was Liu Pang and reigned from 206 to 195 B.C.), the Legalist line was basically upheld for 140 years by six succeeding rulers. The landlord class in these two periods was equally in the ascendant, and yet the results were different. Why?

Obviously what happened in the early and middle periods of the Western Han Dynasty was affected by the peasant war at the end of the Chin Dynasty which swept away the remnants of the slave-owning aristocrats and by the balance of class forces in the early years of the Han Dynasty. At the same time, it could not be denied that the long-term preservation of a Legalist leading group in the central political power of the Western Han Dynasty also played an important part. From the overthrow of the Chin Dynasty, Liu Pang came to understand the central leading group's extreme importance. He held fast to the Legalist line of selecting officials in the course of struggle. After his death, Queen Lu, Emperor Wen and several succeeding emperors continued to follow Liu Pan's Legalist line; they set great store by the opinions of such Legalists as Chao Tso (200-154 B.C.), Chang Tang (?-115 B.C.) and Sang Hung-yang (152-80 B.C.) and put them in important

posts in the central government. Adherence to the Legalist line was ensured because of the existence of such a leading group which continued to carry out the Legalist line. So even when armed rebellions broke out, they were promptly quelled.

This was the specific reason why the slave-owners' restorationist forces considered the Legalist leading group in the central organ their biggest obstacle in the way of restoration. Liu Pi (215-154 B.C.), who was prince of Wu and a nephew of Liu Pang and one of the princes in the early years of the Han Dynasty, put forth the counter-revolutionary strategy of "cleaning up those around the emperor" which, under the facade of supporting the central authorities, aimed at removing the policy-making Legalists in the central organ and putting an end to the Legalist leading group at the central level, thereby basically changing the Legalist line in the political power of the Western Han Dynasty as a whole.

After summing up this important experience in the history of struggle between the Confucian and Legalist schools, Chairman Mao pointed out: **"Ever since Liu Pi, Prince of Wu of the Han Dynasty, invented the well-known strategy of cleaning up those around the emperor by a request to kill Chao Tso (chief brain-truster of Emperor Ching), many careerists have regarded it as invaluable, and the Hu Feng clique has inherited this legacy, too."** Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, those bourgeois representatives who have wormed their way into the Party often will adopt this counter-revolutionary strategy of "cleaning up those around the emperor" in order to bring about a fundamental change in the Party's basic line. In his *Outline of Project "571,"* didn't the counter-revolutionary careerist and conspirator Lin Piao rave about flaunting the revolutionary banner to attack the revolutionary forces that persevered in Chairman Mao's correct line? **"As members of a revolutionary party, we must get to know these tricks of theirs and study their tactics so that we can defeat them."** (Introductory note to the "Third Batch of Material on the Hu Feng Counter-Revolutionary Clique.") We must be adept at detecting these careerists, conspirators and double-dealers and ensure that the Party and state leadership be always in the hands of the Marxist revolutionaries.

Persist in Continuing the Revolution

The feudal rulers carried out the Legalist line up to the end of the middle period of the Western Han Dynasty. In its struggle against restoration, the landlord class, however, aimed only at maintaining feudal rule and could not raise new revolutionary tasks for itself. After succeeding Hsiao Ho (?-193 B.C.) as prime minister in the early years

of the Han Dynasty, Tsao Tsan (?-190 B.C.) told Emperor Hui: "Emperor Kao Ti [Liu Pang] and Hsiao Ho have brought stability to the country and made laws clearly known to the people; now Your Majesty should just take the reins and Tsan and others should hold our posts by following what already has been established without change. Isn't this all right?" This typical case showed that though the landlord class at that time still adhered to the Legalist line, it lacked the clear-cut revolutionary spirit of the Legalists in the stormy periods of class struggle. Its revolutionary vigour and strength were gradually declining.

With the gradual disappearance of the danger of restoration of slavery after the Western Han Dynasty, the contradiction between the landlords and peasants daily grew sharper and the landlord class was being transformed from a real tiger to a paper tiger. The landlord class began to detest the Legalist ideas and found that the somewhat modified Confucian ideas suited its needs. This transformation was the inevitable historical destiny of an exploiting class.

However, the proletariat is different; it is most thoroughly revolutionary and its final goal is to wipe out classes and realize communism. Therefore, it persists in continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Precisely as Lenin pointed out: "**Our 'guarantee against restoration' was the complete fulfillment of the revolution.**" (*Report on the Unity Congress of the R.S.D.L.P.*) Chairman Mao also pointed out: The new socialist system can be "**consolidated step by step**" only in the course of socialist revolution. "**To achieve its ultimate consolidation, it is necessary not only to bring about the socialist industrialization of the country and persevere in the socialist revolution on the economic front, but to carry on constant and arduous socialist revolutionary struggles and socialist education on the political and ideological fronts.**" (*Speech at the Chinese Communist Party's National Conference on Propaganda Work.*) This tells us that only by persevering in long-term socialist revolution and socialist education in the political, ideological and economic fields can the proletariat that has seized political power prevent capitalist restoration and fulfil the historical task of proletarian dictatorship.

The class basis of the struggle between the Confucian and Legalist schools changed in the middle and later periods of feudal society. The Confucian doctrines became the dominant ideology of the landlord class while the Legalists ceased to represent the newly rising class and became reformers in the landlord class. In view of the serious social and national crises at different times, they did come out with various proposals for reform which, for instance, stressed unity and waging wars of resistance and opposed splits and capitulation. Their proposals and exposure and criticism of the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius were

beneficial to the development of the social productive forces, culture and science and the country's unity and independence, and were therefore progressive in nature. However, it was impossible for the Legalists to solve the daily sharpening basic contradiction in feudal society and find a way out for the feudal system. Although they criticized the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius in varying degrees, they were unwilling to or dared not make a radical rupture with these doctrines and, moreover, they dared not openly raise the Legalist banner. They carried on the struggle, but they no longer had full confidence in the future as the Legalists before the Western Han Dynasty had.

Because the Confucianists became increasingly dominant in feudal society, the Legalists were more and more oppressed, attacked and persecuted by them. This was more so the case after the Sung Dynasty (960-1279). Any minimal reform was regarded as a calamity and struck fear into the feudal rulers who immediately strangled it; any new idea was regarded as heresy by the feudal rulers who would stamp it out by every means. The struggle between the Confucian and Legalist schools throughout feudal society shows that the trend of thinking in China which worships the Confucian school and opposes the Legalist school represents the interests of the most reactionary and darkest forces and always hinders social change and social progress. Unless great efforts are made to criticize this reactionary trend of thinking, revolution cannot advance and society cannot move forward.

Purpose of Studying the Struggle Between The Confucian and Legalist Schools

Going with the tide of historical development, the Legalists of the past played a progressive role to a certain extent in different periods and under various conditions. But it was impossible for them to grasp consciously the objective law of historical development and understand the great role of the people in making history. Guided by the Marxist world outlook, the proletariat is able to understand and consciously grasp the objective law of historical development and carry out thoroughgoing revolution. The basic line of our Party formulated by Chairman Mao for the entire historical period of socialism is the scientific expression of the objective law of class struggle in the period of socialism. Although the task of struggle is arduous and the road of struggle tortuous, the future is bright. The replacement of the bourgeois dictatorship by the proletarian dictatorship and the supersession of capitalism by socialism is the inevitable law of historical development and cannot be changed by any force in the world.

By applying Marxism in studying the historical experience of the

struggle between the Confucian and Legalist schools and summing up the general law of class struggle and the two-line struggle in history, we can deepen our understanding of the law of current class struggle, further strengthen our concept of class struggle and raise our consciousness of carrying out the Party's basic line; this will help consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat, prevent capitalist restoration and accomplish the great historical mission of the proletariat. This is the basic purpose of our studying the historical experience of the struggle between the Confucian and Legalist schools and the class struggle as a whole.