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## Theses on the Chinese revolution - Cajo Brendel



Cajo Brendel discusses the Chinese revolution and conflicts between the Chinese Communist Party and the working class and peasantry, and conflicts within the Party itself.

By Cajo Brendel - Solidarity (U.K.) Pamphlet # 46 (1974)

### [Preface to the Second English Edition](#)

The Theses on the Chinese Revolution were written during the spring and summer of 1967, when China was in the throes of the so-called 'Cultural Revolution'. Information concerning these historic events was insufficient at the time. The author nevertheless made an attempt at a social analysis, that brought him to certain

conclusions concerning the Chinese Revolution as a whole. The author's views differ fundamentally not only from those of the Maoists, but also from those of all sorts of Leninists (Trotskyists included). Unlike what they think-and in contradistinction too to bourgeois appreciations-the Theses don't accept that the political aims of the Chinese Communist Party determined the Chinese events. On the contrary, those political aims and the events that really occurred were both aspects of the stage of development of the Chinese Revolution. This revolutionary process is none other than the transition from pre-capitalist forms of production into a modern society, based on wage-labour, and on its way to something like state- capitalism.

The Theses on the Chinese Revolution were first published in Dutch in the monthly *Daad en Gedachte* ('Act and Thought'). in the spring of 1969 they were published in France in *Cahiers du Communisme de Conseils*. In 1971 the first English edition appeared as an Aberdeen Solidarity pamphlet. In 1973 an Italian edition was published in Caserta. In one respect this second English edition is like the first; in the Theses proper, nothing has been changed. Although the author resorted to several sources, among them some well known sinologists, outstanding Chinese communist writers (such as Mao himself), pamphlets (published in English in the People's Republic of China) and articles from *Peking Review*, he desisted from footnotes. He preferred to convince, not by mentioning names or titles, but by the inherent logic of the series of events that have been recorded.

True enough, many explanations could now be expanded on the basis of greater knowledge. But to do so would have taken us far

beyond the original character of the Theses, although it would not have meant any fundamental reappraisal. The new facts at the author's disposal have not basically transformed his views. On the contrary, as he sees it the latest developments in China have only confirmed them.

This is best understood if one looks at two of his other writings, added here to the primary text by way of introduction. The first deals with some aspects of Chinese foreign policy. It was finished shortly after the restoration of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the USA. The main point is a critical look at Chou-En-lai's attitude to the Ceylon and Bangladesh revolutions. The second point—specially dealt with for this edition—describes the conflicts within the Chinese Communist Party as they became apparent at its Tenth Congress and through the anti-Confucius campaign. Both essays must be considered as a link between the seven year old Theses and the present state of affairs. The author hopes that they will contribute to making current events more easily understood.

### Introduction (1974)

#### 1) Some Reflections on the Counter-Revolutionary Nature of Chinese Diplomacy

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century the USA, under George Washington, threw off the British colonial yoke. Even before the French people had made their own middle-class revolution, the Americans had sent to the courts and governments of a predominantly feudal\* (\*The British Kingdom (since the revolutions of 1641 and 1688) and the Dutch Republic were the sole

exceptions.) Europe their own diplomatic representatives.

To the Paris court of Louis XVI there came in this role one of America's most able ambassadors: none other than Benjamin Franklin. In the preceding years he had not only been a red-hot champion of American independence, but he had also acquired an international reputation as a physical scientist. In his person two things found themselves combined. He was enveloped in the lustre of the young Transatlantic Republic which, by its very existence, announced to the absolutist princes that their reign had come to an end. On the other hand, Franklin was the personification of pure science, unobstructed by ecclesiastical dogma. Technical progress, based on the new science, had enabled the rising bourgeoisie to build up its own forms of production in countries that were still dominated by the nobility and clergy.

The fact that it was Benjamin Franklin who had set foot on the French shore as the ambassador of the despised American Republic, had to be tolerated by the worn out order. It also stimulated the self-consciousness of the French Third Estate. The stimulus was made even stronger by the behaviour of this diplomatic representative of the early American employers.

Benjamin Franklin had always led a simple life. This was, on the one hand, the result of puritanism (the product of rising capitalism). On the other, it was explicable by the demands of thrift, created by the problem of accumulation in a country of middle-class pioneers. Franklin would never have dreamt of giving up his way of life, after moving to the extravagant neighbourhood of the French royal household. He went about Paris and Versailles in a dress readily

recognised by all as Third Estate garb. He wore his clothes with the same pride with which the marquesses and dukes of France wore their silk coats. Deeply convinced that his middle-class country-and the republican form of government-represented the future, Franklin forced, by his appearance, the French nobility to honour his personality. In the process, he also forced it to recognise a new class, that was laying an increasing claim to its rightful position in society.

Acting in this manner, Franklin gave an example of revolutionary diplomacy that the world has never seen since. He could be characterised as a middle-class prove. He daily defied his detested class enemy and put new heart into his French class-comrades. Later (after the bourgeois revolution had triumphed in France and elsewhere) such a conduct totally lost its meaning. The bourgeoisie, itself becoming the ruling class, was no longer engaged in revolutionary practice. It started imitating the manners and style of its former class enemy. Nothing could be found anymore of revolutionary diplomacy.

Much later, the world was led for a moment to believe that the Russian Bolsheviks (in different circumstances but in a similar way) had repeated what Benjamin Franklin had done to intimidate the nobility and to activate the Third Estate. In March 1918, when the Soviet government was negotiating at Brest-Litovsk with German imperialism, the Muscovite representatives came to this Polish town with working-class caps and peasant fur coats. Bolshevik Russia had barely introduced the New Economic Policy, had scarcely taken the road to state-capitalism, than its diplomats started behaving just as the official representatives of a state-capitalist republic might be

expected to do. The delegation that sat at Brest-Litovsk, in front of the German imperial generals, was composed of political idealists. When idealism had gone, and the bourgeois character of the Russian Revolution had become obvious, the suits of the Russian diplomats became as starched and conventional as one can imagine. At the same time, the thoroughly bourgeois character of Russian foreign policy and the bourgeois traits of Russian diplomacy appeared.

It is not hard to illustrate this with some examples. In feudal, pre-revolutionary France, Benjamin Franklin would have guarded himself against the smallest gesture that might have been understood as a sign of alliance or sympathy with those in power. On the other hand, the diplomats of state- capitalist Russia (at the time of Lenin and Trotsky, as well as at the time of Stalin and his successors) displayed day after day their inner affinity with capitalism and with the bourgeoisie.

Chicherin, as a People's Commissar for foreign relations, expressed his warm sympathy towards the liberal German Secretary of State, Dr. Stresemann, over the death of President Ebert (a man who once declared that he 'hated revolution like sin'). Later on there were many expressions of sympathy at the death of other dignitaries of the European middle-class. The Kremlin diplomats kept up very friendly relations with Chiang Kai-Shek and with Kemal Pasha, while the latter respectively massacred Chinese and Turkish communists. Representatives of the Kremlin honoured Mussolini, Churchill, and Roosevelt. They entered into a pact with Hitler. In the early thirties they made their way into the League of Nations, which in their revolutionary heyday they had called the

'thieves kitchen'.

From where did these clear and important differences with the revolutionary diplomacy of Benjamin Franklin arise? The explanation is simple. Franklin in eighteenth century France was surrounded by his class enemies. The diplomats of state- capitalist Russia moved in middle-class Western Europe, among people of a similar political and social background. Far from having made diplomatic or psychological mistakes, the Russian representatives did just what they were expected to do.

For some time the Russian (bourgeois) revolution seemed to have great consequences for similar bourgeois developments in Asia and Africa. Bolsheviks, like the previously mentioned Chicherin, or like Borodin (who in the twenties was the political adviser to the Chinese Kuo Min Tang) were political idealists. They dreamed of an anti-colonial struggle in which Eastern peoples would strike a heavy blow at Western capitalism. But this dream had one pre-condition: the political idealists in Russia needed the reassurance that they would not suddenly and horribly be awoken from another dream, the dream that they weren't living, anyhow, in a capitalist country.

As soon as the capitalist nature of Bolshevik society came to the fore, the time for political dreams came to an end. The political idealists made way for the realists. Instead of illusions about revolutionary support for Asia or Africa there came the reality of bestowing favours upon that particular class in Eastern society that tended to slow down the break- through of modern capitalism (with the aid of western imperialism). This harmonised better with Russia's own interests and with the foreign policy which the Kremlin

had opted for ever since 1921.

So it is today with Chinese foreign policy and Chinese diplomacy. The Chinese Revolution had essentially (not in details) the same character as that in Russia in 1917. There may indeed be differences between Moscow and Peking, but China just like Russia is on its way to state-capitalism. Just as Moscow does, Peking pursues a foreign policy that has little to do with revolution elsewhere in Asia (not even middle-class revolution).

Like Russia in the thirties, modern Maoist China has for over 20 years been seeking membership of the United Nations. Chinese foreign policy is not directed at the stimulation of the bourgeois revolution throughout the rest of Asia and in Africa. It is directed at obtaining alliances. It is a policy in which Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai display as little finesse as Stalin and Litvinov displayed in their time.

The true character of Chinese foreign policy and of Chinese diplomacy can be seen in the light of two examples drawn from very recent history. We mean Peking's attitude to the revolutionary events in Ceylon and Pakistan respectively. In Ceylon, where the coalition government of the so-called United Left Front under Prime Minister Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike clashed with the revolutionary movement that stood for a state-capitalist future, Peking did not take the side of the revolutionaries. It gave full support to Mrs. Bandaranaike. The same happened in Pakistan when a civil war broke out between the reactionary feudal dictatorship of General Yahya Khan and the population of East Pakistan. The armed revolt in East Pakistan was the desperate answer to the colonial



exploitation of the country by the West Pakistan clique. It was directed against the pattern of large landownership and against social conditions that intentionally kept the country backward. Sheik Mujibur Rahman headed the uprising for a short time. Even if the insurrection had not been beaten down, he never could have maintained that position. Behind him (and behind the social forces that he represented) more radical forces were looming up, just as in Russia. The Bolsheviks had loomed up behind those political forces that had emerged after the February Revolution.

However, the coming to power of Sheik Mujibur would have meant progress compared to the brutal rule of Yahya Khan, who was linked with imperialism. (We speak of course of progress within the framework of bourgeois development.) Mujibur called himself a 'socialist'. Neither he nor those who are called on to complete the East Pakistan revolution deserve any such denomination. Neither in East nor West Pakistan was socialism on the agenda. Sheik Mujibur represents the East Pakistani bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie is weak, just as it is in most Asian countries. That explains why middle-class revolution in this part of the world tends to be enacted in forms that first manifested themselves in Russia, and later in China.

If-and for convenience only-anyone wanted to give names to the actors in the Pakistan drama, one might call Sheik Mujibur a Menshevik. One might designate as Bolsheviks the revolutionary forces in the background, to which Tariq Ali, the London political writer, belongs. General Yahya Khan could be compared to some Tsarist general or other, perhaps to a Kornilov (a Kornilov successful in the western part of the bi-partite country but who ran

up against serious resistance in its eastern half).

Peking-whose policy is our subject-didn't support the Pakistan 'Bolsheviks'. It didn't even support the 'Menshevik' Sheik Mujibur. Peking gave diplomatic, political and military aid to the Pakistan 'Kornilov', General Yahya Khan. The Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Chou En-lai, sent a message to Yahya Khan that was first published in the Peking Review, then in the Pakistan Times (the mouth-piece of the reactionary West Pakistan government). In this message Chou En-lai declared: 'Your Excellency and leaders of various quarters in Pakistan have done a lot of useful work to uphold the unification of Pakistan and to prevent it from moving towards a split. We believe that through the wise consultations and efforts of Your Excellency and leaders of various quarters in Pakistan, the situation in Pakistan will certainly be restored to normal. In our opinion the unification of Pakistan and the unity of the people of East and West Pakistan are the basic guarantees for Pakistan to attain prosperity and strength.' The meaning was clear enough: Peking was opposed to the national, middle-class uprising in East Pakistan. The People's Republic of China considered the East Pakistan (bourgeois) revolutionaries as 'a handful of persons who want to sabotage the unification of Pakistan'(1) Hence Chou's words in the quoted message.

China, as we have said, did more. She supplied the counter-revolutionary government of Yahya Khan with weapons and equipment. These weapons-tanks made in China-were not only used against the East Pakistan insurgents. They were also used against West Pakistan workers, fighting a class-struggle against their rulers.

In other words Chinese policy towards Pakistan was just like Moscow's policy towards China in the late twenties. At that time Russian aid enabled Chang Kai-shek to massacre the workers of Shanghai. General Yahya Khan massacred the Pakistani workers with Chinese aid.

At a public meeting in Amsterdam the West Pakistani Trotskyist, Tariq Ali, pointed out these facts. The Dutch Maoists present were scandalised. Evidently they hadn't yet read Chou En-lai's letter to Yahya Khan, a letter that had appeared in the Peking Review. They behaved like Stalinists in the thirties, unaware of Stalin's latest changes of line. A Maoist sympathiser, writing in the British paper *New Society* (and much better informed about what had really happened), suggested that the Chinese might have backed Yahya for 'long-term motives', namely to enable him to smash the ('Menshevik') Awami League of Sheik Mujibur and pave the way for the Bengal left. (2) One might ask such a simpleton why Lenin in 1917 didn't back Kornilov, thereby enabling him (Lenin) to settle with the Kerensky government, after a successful coup!

Tariq Ali doesn't talk such nonsense. He considers Chinese foreign policy towards Ceylon and Pakistan as 'wrong' policies. We reject his Bolshevik opinions. We see the policy that we denounce as the logical consequence of the state-capitalist character of the Chinese Republic.

The latest example of this-strictly logical-policy is the Chinese approach to the United Nations and the USA. Peking wants to keep up good relations with both. (3) When a number of young supporters of the American left (and sympathisers of Mao) were

recently in Peking, Chou En-lai made it clear to them that their resistance to Nixon was, of course, just their own problem. China was looking for friendly relations with the White House. Such an attitude is similar to Moscow's attitude to Hitler and to Mussolini. It is the cynical policy of diplomatic zig-zags in front of the worst enemies of the working-class. Neither Mao nor Chou En-lai can be blamed for it, for they are not in office to promote the interests of the Chinese working-class. They are in office to promote the interests of Chinese state-capitalism. It is not they, the Chinese leaders, who are going the 'wrong way'. Those who are on the wrong path are those who expect a revolutionary policy or revolutionary diplomacy from Maoist China.

## 2) The Tenth Congress of the Chinese Party and After

If anyone wishes to characterise the play acted behind closed doors in Peking last summer (under the title of 'Tenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party') he would have to define it as a 'Comedy of Errors'. Although a mere spectator, he would feel like another Duke Solinus who, surrounded by two pairs of twins, didn't know which was which.

Wasn't there the Chinese Foreign Secretary, Chou En-lai, declaring that 'the struggle of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples to obtain or defend national independence was deepening and enlarging as the result of an irresistible historical trend'? Didn't Chou simultaneously express his 'solidarity with oppressed nations all over the world, those countries that were exposed to tyranny and domination' and deplore what he called 'the mutilation of Pakistan' caused by (a fact, of course, which he didn't mention) a social

uprising for autonomy, a social uprising that he (Chou En-lai himself) had vainly helped to suppress? From such words ordinary people might conclude that by Chinese standards 'solidarity with the oppressed' doesn't mean what it means to the oppressed themselves. They might conclude that behind the walls of Peking reigns a confusion of tongues. That first impression would be strengthened by everything the Congress revealed about what was logically its main concern: the Chinese scene itself.

On that score the Congress attached the greatest possible importance to the doings of the late Lin Piao, once Chairman Mao's 'close comrade in arms'. Killed in a plane crash as he was flying to Russia on September 13 1971 (and consequent- ly dead for two years), Lin Piao's ghost overshadowed the Peking conference. The meeting so remembered him, and was so dominated by his personality, that the 1249 delegates even proceeded to expel him from the party 'once and for all', as if he were still in the world of the living. Wasn't it confusing that this man, Lin Piao, who as recently as a year before had been posthumously charged with 'left-extremism', was now being called a 'right-wing criminal' who had always (!) had a bourgeois outlook and who had aim- ed at the restoration of capitalism in China. (Incidentally, the forms of production existing in China, based on wage-slavery, didn't need such a 'restoration', being in their very essence capitalist.

Wasn't it even more confusing that Lin Piao (a fervent champion of the so-called 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution'), whose rise to power had taken place during and immediately after that political tempest that had strengthened the Party's position, could have been described as the leader of an anti-Party group? Liu Shao-chi,

Lin Piao's opponent in those crucial years from 1966 to 68, and against whom the whole weight of the Party had been launched, was on the other hand merely described as a 'revisionist', serious as such a charge may be. Wasn't it embarrassing that Wang Hung-wen, a young Shanghai worker who played an important role in the battle against that former head of state, Liu Shao-chi, was chosen as one of the five (instead of one) Vice-Chairmen of the Party, and as a member of its Central Committee, only to be confronted outside the meeting by former political friends of Liu, like Teng Chiau-ping, rehabilitated as were many others of his kind, despite a frontal attack on Liu Shao-chi by Chou En-lai?

One can't avoid asking what, in the Chinese jargon, terms like 'socialism' and 'capitalism', 'revisionism' and 'anti-Party clique' really mean. Can it be that the confusion of tongues in Peking is as great as it was in state-capitalist Russia in the early sixties, when the Moscow leaders were fighting out their differences hidden behind deceptive definitions? Didn't the same abuse of 'anti-Party groups' indicate on that occasion something very different from what one might have expected? Indeed, a short but close examination of those mimic-battles is very useful to clarify their present Chinese counterpart. The spectacular Russian play had been preceded by another. In the twenties and thirties the contradiction between social reality and Bolshevik reality had given rise to a theoretical discussion about Leninist thought, the real issue of which was the class structure of the so-called soviet state. In the early sixties the interpretation of Leninism wasn't at issue. Though Leninism (whatever that happened to be) remained the official Bolshevik theory, its special social function (namely, to hold back the truth about state-capitalist exploitation by discussing it in 'socialist'

phraseology), had become less urgent. Of course Leninism still supplied this ideological need, but at the same time another need had come into being.

In the past the theoretical battles mainly reflected developing contradictions between Russian workers and a new rising ruling class. By the second half of the century, these contradictions had become a widespread reality. The new ruling class was in the process of becoming a dominant and influential factor in society. Against this social background Party traditions, born in entirely different social circumstances, were felt to be theoretical humbug, a stumbling block in the new class's way to genuine development. The new ruling class could no longer collaborate with a bureaucracy that indulged in practices in no way adapted to the new situation, practices that hindered the development of production.

What the new class wanted was a more or less 'new' Bolshevik Party adapted to the current situation, a Party that would recognise the new class's powerful position. The requirements of the new class led to an interesting struggle between the old Party bureaucracy and the representatives of the factory management that had come into being, and that formed the basis of the new class. The struggle lasted many years. Both factions balancing one another, the outcome was for a long time undecided. At one time the old Party held the strongest positions, at other times the managerial faction did.

All this started in darkness, before Stalin's death. It became visible in the post-Stalin era. It reached its culminating point in the days of

Khrushchev, who won power because he was the right man at that particular time. His personality-as his biographer, George Paloczi-Horvath, wrote-was just as enigmatic as the Soviet world. The true content of this enigma was that the Russian situation had produced the unstable character of Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev, and that conversely, an unstable man like Khrushchev (more than anyone else among government notables), was suited to a situation in which neither the bureaucracy nor the new ruling class could claim a final victory. Khrushchev was a misfit in the bureaucracy to which he formally belonged. But he didn't identify himself with the Russian management, nor did the managerial strata regard him as a reliable supporter. Perhaps just because of these qualities, Khrushchev had an unmistakable feeling about what was up. When his adversaries boxed his ears with quotations from the dead Lenin. Khrushchev pointed out that people were living in another time: what was valid then had lost its value. With those words he accurately divulged what was going on behind the scenes.

With Khrushchev in office, the struggle between the new class and the old Party reached its final stage. Lengthy trench warfare made way for a war of movement. So often and so quickly did positions in the Kremlin change that when Suslov and Mikoyan returned to Moscow from a short visit to Budapest (where, as representatives of the new class, they were prepared for a flexible attitude towards the government of Imre Nagy, to whom they had guaranteed the withdrawal of Russian troops) they were confronted with an entirely different mood.\* (\*Background information given by Tibor Meray in one of the most interesting books on the Hungarian Revolution: *Thirteen Days that Shook the Kremlin* (Thames & Hudson, 1958).)

During this period the attack from the new management on the



Party traditionalists became fiercer. The embarrassment provoked by its mystifying slogans was greater than ever before. Those who favoured the domination of the new ruling class over the old bureaucracy never tired of proclaiming their legal heritage from the Party. At the same time the defenders of the Party (old style) were stigmatised as the 'anti-Party group'. What lay behind the slogans and stigmatisations was clear enough in the debate (though it wasn't carried on in plain Russian but in a language one might define as Party-Chinese). We here give some quotations with (in brackets) translations into everyday speech.

<em> KOSYGIN (member of the Presidium of the Central Committee, defending management): 'Members of the anti-Party group opposed everything that was new or progressive. By such an attitude, in fact, they wrecked the economic policy of the Party and of the country ... ' ('The anti-Party group opposed the rise of the new class of managers and wrecked its economic policy'). 'They were against any proposal that could have improved the soviet economy' ('They opposed proposals not in accordance with the policy of the new class'). 'Molotov opposed the new economic and agricultural policy' ('Molotov was an adversary of management'). MIKOYAN (the most outstanding champion of the new class): 'They-the members of the anti-Party group-cling to conservative, dogmatic points of view that prevent the introduction of innovations' ('They stood for the past and opposed any accommodation to the reality of the growing power of the new class'). 'Molotov is the ideologist of bygone times' ('Molotov's thought is adapted to yesterday's reality. That reality does not exist any longer because of the increasing influence of the managerial class'). MOLOTOV (in defence of the anti-Party group): 'The Party's new programme is a

revisionist and counter-revolutionary one' ('The Party's new programme aims to make the Party a tool of the new class. It transforms the principles of Stalinism. It is directed against everything the old Party represented'). SATJUKOV: 'Molotov has always been a bungler in home affairs' ('Political knowledge is strictly reserved for the class that has power and rules').

KHRUSCHEV: 'The Soviet Union is in great need of capital' ('The accumulation of capital doesn't keep pace with the needs of the new managerial class').

Joining the debate in this way, Khrushchev in fact took the victors' side. 'Long live the new ruling class' was the true meaning of his belated intervention. Before long he found out that he had acted too late. He was dismissed as soon as the new ruling class no longer felt itself seriously threatened. With Kosygin's appointment as Prime Minister there started a new chapter in Russian history. Could it be that last year's happenings in China resemble in some way what we have described as happening in Russia? In present day China, too, there are forces at work more or less favourable to the rise of a 'new class'. Attempts to analyse these forces have been made in the Theses. There is no need to repeat the argument. Nor is it necessary again to explain-as was done in the Theses-why the Great Cultural Revolution can be regarded as the response to social developments similar to those that, in Russia, had strengthened managerial positions. There have been many subsequent indications suggesting that the Cultural Revolution wasn't as successful as Chou En-lai would have had the delegates to the Tenth Congress believe. Those social forces in the background which even if they didn't give rise to a 'new class' nevertheless prepared its way (pushing forward individual

managers), still exist. They proved themselves stronger than the violence of the Red Guards and appeared to be totally interwoven with Chinese social relations. However, unlike the 'new class' in Russia, its Chinese counterpart has not so far proved stronger than the Chinese Party. In the course of the Cultural Revolution the Party was transformed for the purpose of better resistance. Such facts should be a warning against too simplified an analogy.

Things in China are not what they had previously been in Russia. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of a (future) managerial class holds the key to every Chinese problem. For instance, Chou En-lai was very clearly criticising the managerial point of view in his speech to the Tenth Congress when he addressed himself to 'those who pretended that after the Ninth Congress (held in April 1969) the development of production should be the Party's main task' and to those 'who claimed that it was not the antagonism between the working class and the bourgeoisie that was the most important contradiction in China, but the contradiction between the advanced socialist system and the backward productive forces in society'.

But in China things are far more complicated than this. The same Chou En-lai, in the same speech, underlines the necessity for a 'transformation of all parts of the superstructure that are not co-ordinated with the economic foundation'. That sounds like a concession to managerial demands. Apparently matters were not pushed to extremes. The forementioned presence of rehabilitated adherents of managerial champion Liu Shao-chi and the fact that some of those men had again been able to obtain influential positions in the country point in the same direction.

The only possible explanation is that hitherto the pro- managerial

and pro-bureaucratic forces were balanced. One must not forget that these are not the only social forces in China, where there is also a very large peasantry. Finally, if the Party was reformed during the Cultural Revolution, partly in response to the views of the peasants, it was just to take the wind out of the management's sails. To conclude: the antagonism between the Party and the new class in China hasn't by a long way reached the point that had been reached in Russia some fifteen years earlier. This is the situation that accounts for various declarations about perfect Party-unity applauded by the delegates in Peking.

How does one reconcile the fact that this unity has been so loudly trumpeted with the fact that delegates were pro-claiming, in the same breath, 'the inevitable necessity for many more struggles in the future'? And why, if unity was as solid as one was made to believe, were the deliberations strictly secret, with only the texts of the speeches and the new constitution published, together with a meaningless official postscript?

The implied contradiction is nothing but a paradox. The appearance of unity stands out because Party and management are equally strong. Hampered by the peasantry, they don't face each other in the same way as they did in Russia. This is why the Cultural Revolution remained unfinished. Behind the scenes, managerial tendencies (the forces that led to the development of the new class) are still at work. Sooner or later the equilibrium will be upset. The Party's new constitution stressed classic Leninist 'democratic centralism' as the basic organisational principle, while at the same time adding that it would be 'absolutely impermissible to suppress criticism and to retaliate' and that, on the contrary, 'the Party should

encourage other views and great debates'. This was an attempt to delay the clash for as long as possible.

Nevertheless the officials are well aware that such a postponement cannot be permanent. 'The downfall of the anti-Party group' Chou En-lai told the delegates, 'doesn't end the struggle between the two Party lines'. It wasn't unity that characterised the Tenth Congress but the sound judgment that the tendencies representing the new class could not be made to disappear and that the fight against them would decide the Party's future. To put it in Mao's words: 'within a number of years another revolution will probably have to be carried out. Demons and devils will break the surface'. Since then, history has borne out that if one talks of the devil he is sure to come.

Before concerning ourselves with the devil, let us talk of the demons. Just as Molotov in Russia, the ghost of Lin Piao was hammered with the charge of defending an 'anti-Party line'. What strikes one is the formal resemblance of the indictments. True enough, the Chinese at their Congress were speaking Party-Russian just as the Russians had been speaking Party-Chinese. This doesn't automatically imply that words in Party Chinese have the same meaning as in Party-Russian.

In Russia the 'anti-Party group' defended the (old) Party. It was therefore attacked by the new class. In China the new class was attacked by the reformed Party that sought new strength through its self-reform. Did Lin Piao resist? If so, his position would have been the opposite to that of Molotov. Instead of defending the Party against the management as Molotov had done, Lin Piao would

have stood at the side of the new class. He would have stood at the side of Liu Shao-chi, who was his bitter enemy in the Cultural Revolution. Though their names were linked at the last Congress, such a conclusion isn't strengthened by Lin Piao's speeches. None of them contain the least indication to such a change of front.

At most, it might be remembered that it was Lin Piao who jammed the brakes on the Red Guards when the Cultural Revolution threatened to plunge the country into economic disaster. But he did so with the full agreement of Mao himself, and of the Party. Could it be that Lin Piao didn't agree with this moderate policy? If so that might explain why the Party first accused him of 'left extremism'. It doesn't explain however why such a reproach was only heard three years later.

Or was Lin Piao really as moderate as he showed himself to be? Hadn't he been on the Party's left long before the Cultural Revolution, whose fruits didn't prove to be as red as many people had expected? What supports this view is the position of his alleged number one accomplice, Chen Po-ta, another head of the Cultural Revolution draft and a faithful transmitter of Mao-thought at every moment of his life. There are good reasons for the view that Lin Piao was a tempered radical and that this led him to being seen as on the left when the Party, withdrawing from the Cultural Revolution line, veered to the right. After Lin Piao's death, his position seemed to be on the right because the pendulum had oscillated and because the Party, in reaction to another new class danger, had undergone a radicalisation.

Against this view one might quote Lin Piao's more or less

'managerial' position concerning production. But this is rather uncertain as Chou En-lai's reproaches on this point were directed rather against Liu Shao-chi, with whom Lin Piao was linked only by means of a political manoeuvre. In favour of this view, on the other hand, are Chou's own words, that the so-called anti-Party line 'had been and still was one of the two lines inside the Party'. Be this as it may, the Party's radicalisation was obvious. The appointment to its leadership of Wang Hung-wen, who had had to be called to order because he had gone 'too far' during the Cultural Revolution, was therefore symptomatic. But let nobody think that the radicalisation in question has anything to do with the working-class struggle against capitalism. At the Tenth Congress no word was spoken either about the exercise of power by the workers themselves or about the abolition of the wages system, or of a society based on production. Chou En-lai commented with satisfaction about 'the stability of prices and the market's prosperous position'. His statement was characteristic both in its lack of any working-class analysis and because of what it revealed concerning the true nature of Chinese economic and social relations.

These basic economic and social relations are evidently not at stake. Consequently the real issue is not the choice between a proletarian or a bourgeois alternative. Everything depends on whether the transformed (or even more transformed) Party or whether management will rule the roost. That is what lies behind the Party's radicalisation, whatever Chou may have been saying about 'a conflict between proletarian and bourgeois interests, in which one would have to distinguish false communists from sincere ones'. Speaking thus, Chou was just churning out Party-jargon, whose deceptive appearance masked real differences. When the

process of radicalisation had started, where did the traditional and outstanding leaders like Mao and Chou really stand? At the Congress the latter never tired of quoting Mao and of stressing his hostility to Lin or Liu. But that doesn't necessarily argue his real position \*\* (\*\*Chou told the delegates, that the official 'Report to the Ninth National Congress', delivered by Lin Piao, had actually been written by Mao; that Lin himself, in collaboration with Chen Po-ta, had drafted another document (that had been cancelled); and that Lin didn't agree with the text he was delivering. Whatever the truth of this story may be (and whatever it may not be) it remains that what could be true for Lin, might also be true for Chou.) What exactly Chou represents is unclear. This is partly due to the fact that, since some time before the Tenth Congress, everything in China's social and political life has again been on the move. Firm positions will become visible as time goes by. That applies to everyone on the Chinese scene.

Concerning Mao for instance, Chou informed the delegates that after the Ninth Congress the Chairman had given several warnings to Lin Piao, all of them in vain, seeking to 'save' him. Does this mean that Mao Tse-tung, Lin Piao and Chen Po-ta hadn't such fundamental differences after all? Was it only at a later date that the rift widened? In that case, it isn't only the official statement about Lin Piao that stands contradicted. It is also suggested that Mao wasn't heading the radicalisation but merely tail-ending it.

How, in connection with all this, should one seek to understand the three attempts on Mao's life, in which Lin Piao is said to have been closely involved as the main conspirator? Were these attempts made because the Chairman tended to an even more



managerial point of view? Or were they made because Mao firmly refused to adopt such a position? Listening to the Party-jargon, looking at the Chinese smoke-screen, happenings remain obscure. Nevertheless, conclusions can be drawn that go far beyond the commonplace fixations about a 'power battle'. Such descriptions don't tell us anything of the social forces that drive the actors to appear before the footlights. It is far more important to understand this fact than to know who is who. From the historical point of view it doesn't matter so much whether this one or that one represents the Party or the management. The actors are of secondary interest. The play: that's the point. The battle for power is not important. What are important are the economic and social frameworks that determine its limits and by which it is characterised. It is for this reason that we have placed in the centre of our analysis the struggle between the new class and the Party bureaucracy, quite apart from actual questions of policy. The correctness of this method is confirmed when we examine the anti-Confucius campaign, a campaign that reached its full development after the Tenth Congress.

The campaign was launched on August 7 1973 by an article in the Peking Peoples Paper. The author was Yang Chung-kuo, deccan of the Philosophy Faculty of the Canton Sun Yat-sen University (and since referred to as the No. 1 theorist of anti- Confucianism). The campaign did not start as a pure philosophical discussion. Philosopher Yang said, 'the battle of words with Confucius has a very actual meaning. To criticise his reactionary thoughts can be useful whenever one participates in present-day class struggle ...' What sort of class struggle could Yang be referring to? Neither in his article nor in the debate that followed was the subject touched

upon. Nowhere was it treated from the point of view that human thought is connected with society, and therefore is right as long as the society exists that gave birth to it, becoming incorrect to the extent that a given society is lost in its successor. Such a treatment, linked with the conviction of the oppressed that neither society nor thought are invariable and eternal, doesn't suit any ruling class. Ruling classes never have an eye for the relativity of their own mastery. From the mere fact that things were not put in this way one can draw some plausible conclusions.

Confucius wasn't interpreted as a child of his time, who reflected the social relations and contradictions of the Chou dynasty in Chinese antiquity. His ideas were considered apart from their soil. They were described as intrinsically reactionary. No attempt was made to understand Confucius from within Chinese society. On the contrary, Chinese society was explained by stressing Confucius' influence. This method naturally led to the substitution of social comprehension by moral judgement.

Consequently the anti-Confucius campaign wasn't a philosophical attack on the essential roots of class power. That remains unchallenged. The discussions became moral condemnations of certain politicians on behalf of others. For this purpose, Confucius, who had died 2000 years previously, was raised from his grave and criticised. Whether all this was really being aimed at the dead Lin Piao, or at his living competitors, is less clear. But once again this is of secondary significance.

For our purpose, it is more important to realise that there is a direct connection between the anti-Confucius campaign and the issues of

the Cultural Revolution. 'Confucius', we are told by Philosopher Yang, 'reserved absolute wisdom for the monarch. The reformers of his time however wanted freedom of thought on behalf of a hundred philosophical schools, with different and opposite opinions.' Confucius 'promised his monarch all the land. The reformers on the contrary were fighting for private landed property and for individual farming'.

The themes hardly need further explanation. Yang, whose origin was the non-Bolshevik Democratic League of China (which had once taken an intermediate position between the Communist Party and the Kuo Min-tang) seems to be a clear voice of the new class. When he speaks of a less important philosopher, dispatched at Confucius' command, one might believe that he is not only pointing at Lin Piao's murder plot against Mao but that-from an opposite position-he is also referring to the rumour that Lin didn't die in a plane crash but was done away with by Chou En-lai. If Yang condemns Confucius for calling back 'those who were already buried in oblivion, aiming to restore the old order', that too seems to concern Chou. Chou, after all, was the man who for many years had been the architect of the new class policy. Moreover, he had his own responsibility for the rehabilitation of those who had been sacrificed in the Cultural Revolution.

Yang can thus be interpreted in different ways, possibly because his philosophical contribution to an actual struggle suffers from the contradictions of the struggle itself. Another possibility is that these contradictions are either the pure consequence of the special Party-philosophical jargon, or that they have been created deliberately, for reasons of safety in turbulent times. For times are turbulent in

China. Quoting Confucius, bureaucrats and managers march against each other. The devil that looms up is a second Cultural Revolution, as predicted by Chairman Mao. Whose future is at stake? That of Chou or that of Mao? Time will tell. Nonetheless, one thing seems certain: the outcome of the struggle will not in the least change the (state) capitalist nature of Chinese society. The rule of the Party-bureaucracy or managerial rule? That is the question for the years to come. Whatever the answer, in the long run the new class seems to have the best testimonials.

Originally written in 1967

## [The Character of the Chinese Revolution](#)

1. When the armies of Mao Tse Tung and of General Chu Teh crossed the Yangtse river in April 1949, the seal of defeat was almost set on the forces of Chiang Kai Shek. His power had collapsed and before the autumn the Kuo Min Tang was to be driven from the mainland. The world started talking of a 'victory for communism' in China. The Kung Tsiang Tang (the KTT or the Chinese Communist Party) was however to characterise its military victory over the Kuo Min Tang as the 'victory of the national bourgeois democratic revolution' which had begun 38 years earlier. What the KTT proposed and what Mao Tse Tung considered his first task-was the 'stimulation of the revolutionary process'. The bourgeois revolution, according to their beliefs, would be followed by the proletarian socialist revolution. At a later stage the 'transition to communism' would be on the agenda. There is a striking resemblance between the ideas of Mao and the KTT on the development of the Chinese revolution, and those of Lenin and the Bolsheviks on the development of the Russian revolution.

2. This similarity is not coincidental. In both countries the revolutions resulted from similar factors and conditions. Both countries were backward at the beginning of this century. Their relations of production and their patterns of exploitation were semi-feudal(or related to feudalism) and were predominantly based on agriculture. Their populations were largely peasant. Religious beliefs permeated both societies, reflecting the social conditions: in China Confucianism, and in Russia Greek Orthodoxy. The social reality in each country formed the basis of similarly oppressive regimes: the Tsars in Russia and the Manchu Emperors in China.

3. In both Russia and China the revolutions had to solve the same political and economic tasks. They had to destroy feudalism and to free the productive forces in agriculture from the fetters in which existing relations bound them. They also had to prepare a basis for industrial development. They had to destroy absolutism and replace it by a form of government and by a state machine that would allow solutions to the existing economic problems. The economic and political problems were those of a bourgeois revolution; that is, of a revolution that was to make capitalism the dominant mode of production.

4. The Development Plan issued by the KTT in the autumn of 1949 confirmed all this. It challenged Chinese social traditions, based on family ties and on local and regional government. It advocated agrarian reform through the introduction of more modern methods of production and by the extension of the area under cultivation. The KTT wanted to harness China's Immense resources of human labour power and by extending and improving the educational system, to prepare the population for the role assigned to them in a

society undergoing industrialisation. China's new rulers wanted a modern road network to bring the areas producing materials into closer contact with the urban industrial centres. According to the KTT the primary task was the creation of modern industry. Mao's programme for the period to follow the 'taking of power' was essentially the programme of triumphant capitalism .

## [Class Relations in the Chinese Revolution](#)

5. The economic and political problems of the bourgeois revolution were, generally speaking, ready to be tackled in France in 1789. There were, however, enormous differences between the bourgeois revolutions in China and Russia, on the one hand, and that in France on the other. And it is precisely in those areas where the Russian and Chinese revolutions of this century differ from the French revolution that they resemble one another. In France, the bourgeois revolution of 1789 took a classical form--the form of a struggle of the bourgeoisie against the ruling classes of a pre-bourgeois period. But neither in China nor in Russia was there a bourgeoisie capable of understanding or conducting such a struggle. The characteristic feature of the revolutions in both countries is that they were bourgeois revolutions in which classes other than the bourgeoisie occupied the role played, in the eighteenth century, by the bourgeoisie in France.

These fairly unusual class relationships were to form the basis of Bolshevism in both Russia and China. Bolshevism did not occur in China because Mao Tse Tung and his co-thinkers were Bolsheviks but because conditions in China were similar to those in Russia which originally created Bolshevism. In neither Russia nor China could capitalism triumph except in its Bolshevik form.

6. In both China and Russia feudalism (or its equivalent) had persisted until fairly recent times as a result of the stagnation of agrarian development. In both countries capitalism arose out of what might be called external needs. With it an embryonic bourgeoisie and an embryonic proletariat developed. In Russia capitalism arose as a result of the economic needs of Tsarist militarism. Industrialisation began in Petrograd, in Moscow, in the coal-bearing Donetz basin and around the oilfields of Baku. In China the same process occurred in the major ports of Shanghai, Canton and Nanking. In China, however, the proletariat formed an even smaller percentage of the population than in Russia. Despite the many similarities, this fact was to result in great differences between the revolutions in the two countries.

7. The 'bourgeoisie' which, in (China and Russia) developed alongside the process of industrialisation, in no way resembled the 'Third Estate' which, at the onset of the French bourgeois revolution, had proudly proclaimed its right to power. The bourgeoisie in China and Russia arose as a class without any firm economic base of its own. It was supported by foreign capitalism and developed in the shadow of an absolutism which had itself made concessions to foreign capitalism.

## [The Development of the Revolutions in China and Russia](#)

8. In Russia, although the working class was small, the conditions of Tsarism ensured that it was very militant. Such militancy, combined with its concentration in certain areas, allowed the Russian proletariat significantly to influence events. It played an

important role in both 1905 and 1917 just as the peasants did as a result of their sheer numerical force. Russia also had an intelligentsia for whom history had reserved a special role. From the ranks of the intellectuals came the cadres of professional revolutionaries of the Bolshevik Party. Lenin once said of such professional revolutionaries (and it was far truer than he realised) that they were 'Jacobins bound to the masses', i.e. revolutionaries of a distinctly bourgeois type, advocating a typically bourgeois method (or form) of organisation.

These Jacobin Bolsheviks left their imprint on the Russian revolution just as-conversely--they were themselves to be influenced by the Russian events. They used the word 'smytschka' to describe the needs of the revolution. The 'smytschka' was class alliance between workers and peasants, classes with completely different interests but who, each by itself, could not achieve their own aims in any permanent way. In practice (and as a historical result), this came to mean that the Party occupied a position of authority above the two classes. This situation continued until, as a result of social development, a new class appeared, a class engendered by the post-revolutionary mode of production.

9. In China history repeated itself but in a somewhat different form. Although the Chinese revolution in general resembled the Russian, it differed from it utterly in some respects. There was, firstly, an enormous difference in tempo. Although the Chinese revolution began in 1911, in the beginning (apart from some important events in 1913, 1915 and 1916) it only marked time. At its onset, in contrast to what happened in Russia in 1917, the mass of the population did not enter the scene. The fall-or rather the



abdication-of the Manchus was a belated echo of mass movements of bygone years such as the Tai Ping revolt and the Boxer Rebellion. The abdication was not the sequel to an uprising. The 'Imperial Son of Heaven' offered China the republic on a tray. Imperial authority was not destroyed as French royalty or Russian Tsarism had been but was bequeathed by imperial decree to Yuan Shih Kai. Yuan has been nicknamed the 'Chinese Napoleon' for his unsuccessful attempt at replacing the Empire by a military dictatorship. But this is an inaccurate designation. Napoleon was the executor of the will of the bourgeois revolution whereas Yuan Shih Kai was only the executor of the will of a bankrupt imperial household. As such Yuan Shih Kai proved an obstacle to the development of the revolution.

Yuan cannot be compared to Bonaparte but is perhaps more like Kornilov, the Russian general who at the end of the summer of 1917 prepared a counter-revolutionary coup. When faced with this danger the Bolsheviks called for resistance and the Petrograd workers intervened on the side of the revolution. Nothing similar could have occurred in China where the working class, small as it was, was too weak even to contemplate such action. The progress of the Chinese bourgeois revolution was therefore slowed down.

10. In China historical necessity had thrown up no Jacobins to oppose Yuan Shih Kai; what did exist was a petty bourgeois intelligentsia-radical and republican. Their radicalism was, however, relative in the extreme and only discernible in relation to the reactionary Chinese bourgeoisie who flirted with both Yuan Shih Kai and the empire. This petty bourgeoisie was represented by Sun Yat Sen, who followed in the footsteps of Confucius in advocating class

reconciliation. Sun Yat Sen sought a compromise between ancient China and a modern (i.e. bourgeois) republic.

Such illusions certainly could not stimulate revolutionary attitudes. They explain why Sun Yat Sen capitulated without resistance to Yuan Shih Kai when for a short time after 1911 he found himself in the foreground of events. Yuan Shih Kai's lack of success was due primarily to the forces of separatism and decentralisation which had rendered impossible the continued existence of the Manchu monarchy and had seriously impeded the maintenance of the former power structures even under a modified form.

11. China in 1911 did not become a national bourgeois state as France, Germany or Italy had become after their respective bourgeois revolutions. Consequently China fell prey to a handful of generals such as Sun Chuan Fang and Feng Yu Hsiang who fought each other for over a decade, whereas in Russia generals such as Denikin, Kolchak and Wrangel only entered the scene after the revolution of 1917. In Russia the generals fought the peasants, the workers and the Bolsheviks; in China the generals fought to prevent events like those that had taken place in Russia in 1917 before there was any chance of their occurrence. They attempted not to erase events but to preclude them by extending their power over the greater part of China. But all of them failed. It was not until the late twenties that Chiang Kai Shek succeeded; at a time when the revolution had entered a new phase.

Chiang Kai Shek was unlike the other generals; he was not a feudal war-lord nor did he represent the well-to-do peasants. He was the general of the Chinese 'Girondins', the general of the Kuo Min Tang.

His party had been forced into revolutionary activity for a short period by the pressure of the masses, now beginning to play an active part in events. After marking time for a quarter of a century, the Chinese revolution had reached the stage which the Russian revolution had reached in February 1917, despite the still very different social conditions in the two countries.

## The Parties in the Chinese Revolution

12. The Kuo Min Tang (the National Party of China) is the oldest party to have played a role in the Chinese revolution. It was the heir of the Tung Min Wuo ('United Front of Revolutionaries') which itself continued the traditions of the 'China Awakes' secret society. This was formed outside China by Sun Yat Sen in 1894 with the support of emigre petty traders. The petty bourgeois base of this group remained tradesmen and intellectuals but it also comprised many soldiers and officials with careerist notions. It also gained support from the ranks of the Chinese bourgeoisie, still in its infancy.

13. The outlook of the KMT was as vague as its heterogeneous composition might lead one to expect. It failed to realise that, as in all bourgeois revolutions, the development of China's economy depended on an agrarian reform and on the freeing of the peasantry from feudal forms of ownership. The confusion was inevitable for this freeing of the peasantry was inseparably connected with the breakdown of traditional Chinese family relationships. These relationships were an integral part of the future China envisaged by Sun Yat Sen and the KMT.

The KMT were republican nationalists and the logical consequence of nationalism was a struggle against imperialism. But this was

impossible for a party whose bourgeois supporters were so strongly linked to that very imperialism. So confused were Sun Yat Sen's ideas that he seriously believed that China could be unified and strong under a central power supported by foreign capital. He failed to realise that such foreign capital benefited most from China's weakness. The main feature of the ideas of Sun Yat Sen and the KMT was, however, their notion of a general reconciliation between classes. This unrealistic ideal incontestably corresponded to the fact that the KMT was the political expression of basically antagonistic interests.

14. It was only in the early twenties, when the Chinese people took action to defend themselves against an oppressive imperialism, that the KMT moved to the left. The party was reorganised and Sun Yat Sen drew up a programme for it which for the first time recognised the agrarian problem as basic to the development of Chinese society. The programme was however so obscured by Confucian terms that hampered its revolutionary interpretation that the left and right wings of the party could interpret it as they chose.

Despite this, the KMT was driven by events for a while to fight imperialism and the forces of reaction which had remained as strong as they had been in 1911. For a time it seemed as if a form of 'Jacobin democracy' would appear within the nationalist party. The revolution gained momentum but this only exacerbated the contradictions between the various social groups which composed the KMT. As the revolution moved forward, all that was reactionary within China arose against it.

15. Kung Tsiang Tang (the Chinese Bolshevik party) emerged in the

years 1920-21 for much the same reasons as the Russian Bolshevik Party had been formed twenty years before. As the Chinese bourgeoisie was failing in its own mission, the workers and the peasants became the fighting force of the revolution. Because it was a bourgeois revolution and not a proletarian revolution that was the order of the day, the organisation formed in the struggle-in the wake of the shortcomings of the KMT-proved to be of bourgeois type: a party. The party was created on Leninist lines because conditions were similar to those which had given rise to the Bolshevik Party in Russia. Its internal structure and its social and political ideas corresponded to these material circumstances.

16. The Chinese scholar Chen Tu Hsiu who founded the KTT made of it a faithful copy of the Russian Bolshevik Party. This was confirmed by Mao Tse Tung himself when, in a speech on the occasion of the 28th anniversary of the KTT in June 1949, he said: 'It was through the practices of the Russians that the Chinese discovered Marxism. Before the October Revolution the Chinese were not only ignorant of Lenin but also of Marx and Engels. The salvoes of the guns of the October Revolution brought us Marxism-leninism.' The Chinese concluded from this that 'it was necessary for us to follow the way of the Russians.'

This conclusion was correct, but only because 'Marxism-Leninism' has nothing in common with Marxism other than terminology. Marxism was the theoretical expression of class relationships within capitalism. Leninism is a transformation of social-democratic ideas to fit particular Russian conditions. And these conditions were to shape Bolshevism more than did the social-democratic ideas. If Leninism had been Marxism, the Chinese would have had nothing

to do with it, and what Mao said of other western theories could have been applied to Leninism itself, namely: 'the Chinese have learned much from the West but nothing of any practical use.'

17. Although the KTT could borrow its structure from the Russian Bolshevik Party as a result of the similarity between conditions in the two countries, these conditions were not identical. It was therefore necessary to modify Leninism to fit Chinese conditions just as Lenin had previously changed western ideas to fit the Russian situation. As the situation in China resembled that in Russia more closely than Russian conditions resembled those of western Europe, the alterations made were less drastic.

Undoubted changes were made, however, and Chinese Bolshevism while remaining Bolshevism was to reflect a much stronger peasant influence than did the Russian variety. This adaption to more primitive conditions was not consciously undertaken but occurred under the pressure of reality. The visible influence of this pressure was the total renewal of the party around 1927. As long as it had remained a faithful copy of the Russian model, the KTT had been completely impotent in the maelstrom of the Chinese revolution, but once it identified more closely with the peasant masses, it became an important factor. This explains why Chen Tu Hsiu was expelled in 1927 at the time of the 'renewal of the cadres'. The 'rebels in the countryside' were joining in large numbers. Chen Tu Hsiu, the Marxist scholar, was replaced by Mao Tse Tung, the peasant's son from Honan.

18. A third party to appear in the Chinese revolution was the Democratic League. Founded in 1941, the League sought from the

beginning to act as a buffer between the KMT and the KTT. In the newspaper Ta Kun Puo (January 21 1947), close contacts of the League defined its activities as conducting propaganda for democracy and acting as intermediaries between the KMT and the Bolsheviks with a view to achieving national unity'. Elsewhere the League defines itself as being directed towards the end of civil war and towards peace.

The League sought to reconcile the irreconcilable. The compromise put forward (the League themselves used the word 'compromise') was an attempt similar to the one made by Sun Yat Sen in 1912 when he gave way to Yuan Shih Ksi 'to avert a civil war'. But in 1912 the revolution once begun, civil war was inevitable. All attempts to compromise at that stage or later in history only had one result: an intensification of the civil war.

19. It has been said of the Democratic League, founded by the coalition of various groups and small parties, that most of its supporters were academics or students and that they used the word 'democracy' much as it is used in the West, namely to mean the rule of the bourgeoisie. What is true in this characterisation is that these scholars were the heirs to the Mandarins who had ruled China for over 3,000 years but what they had learnt from western bourgeois democrats was but a thin veneer over their basic Confucian philosophy. The basic feature of this philosophy is its concern for 'peace' and the avoidance of class struggle. The Mandarins of the League maintained close economic and family ties with the uppermost stratum of Chinese society. This social layer had one foot in bourgeois society but also maintained feudal interests.

This social background was eloquently expressed in the politics of the League; despite its outwardly severe critique of the KMT, its practical actions were confined to attempts at reforming the KMT. Such attempts were fruitless. The 'faults' of the KMT could not have been eliminated without eliminating the social circumstances which had given rise to both the KMT and the Democratic League.

20. The end of the civil war in China could not have been achieved by the compromises suggested by the League but only by pursuing the civil war to its conclusion. The League never abandoned its pacific policies but reality forced it eventually to modify them. Hesitatingly, reluctantly and too late in the day, even on their own admission, the League declared war on Chiang Kai-shek, whom they (politically short sighted as they were) had always taken for a moderate man. At that very moment Chiang Kai-shek returned to his policy of destroying the advocates of policies of compromise and moderation, which he had temporarily interrupted during the war with Japan. The Democratic League, caught between the left and the right, was crushed by the unfolding of events and disappeared. That was in the autumn of 1947.

### [The Chinese Kerensky and the Peasants](#)

21. In the years 1927 to 1947 the Chinese revolution underwent a second period of stagnation. During this period the KMT was in power, having separated itself from its youth and its own Jacobin wing. This was the Girondin period which had begun with the defeat of Sun Yat Sen and of the left.

In the spring of 1927 social antagonisms brought about a political



crisis and a subsequent split in the party. In the April of that year there were two KMT governments; a left wing one at Wu Han and a right wing one at Nanking. The differences between them were not great for the Wu Han regime itself was to keep its distance from the peasantry, now becoming active. The Nanking regime reacted in the same way. There was no difference between the agrarian policies of the two regimes.

When the peasant movement in Honan took on the appearance of a mass revolt, Tan Ping San, the Minister of Agriculture at Wu Han, traveled to the province to 'prevent excesses'... (in other words to suppress the revolt). Tan Ping San was a Bolshevik and a member of the KTT (then working in close collaboration with the KMT). Chen Tu Hsiu, then still Party Leader, reasoned as follows: 'An agrarian policy which is too radical would create a contradiction between the army and the government in which the KTT is participating. The majority of army officers come from-a background of small landowners who would be the first people to suffer in an agrarian reform.'

This is yet another example of why it proved necessary to renew the ranks of the Bolshevik Party with peasants. It was clear, moreover, that the Wu Han administration stood between the peasant revolts and the Nanking government and that, because of its petit-bourgeois base, it did not take its flirtation with radical Jacobinism too seriously. As a result it was forced to surrender to Nanking at the beginning of 1928, leaving Chiang Kai-shek master of the situation.

22. The Nanking government of Chiang proved victorious in the

critical year of 1927, great working class uprisings had to be put down in Shanghai and Canton. It is claimed by some that these uprisings were attempts by the Chinese proletariat to influence events in a revolutionary direction. This could not have been the case. Twenty-two years after the massacres in these two towns the Chinese Ministry of Social Affairs announced that in China there were fourteen industrial towns and just over a million industrial workers in a population of between four and five hundred millions-i.e. industrial workers comprised less than 0.25% of the population. In 1927 this figure must have been still lower.

With the proletariat insignificant as a class in 1949, it seems unlikely that they could have engaged in revolutionary class activity twenty-two years earlier. The Shanghai uprising of March 1927 was a popular uprising whose aim was to support Chiang Kai-shek's Northern Expedition. The workers only played a significant role in it because Shanghai was China's most industrialised town, where one-third of the Chinese proletariat happened to live. The uprising was 'radical- democratic' rather than proletarian in nature and was bloodily quelled by Chiang Kai-shek because he scorned Jacobinism, not because he feared the proletariat. The so-called 'Canton Commune' was no more than an adventure provoked by the Chinese Bolsheviks in an attempt to bring off what they had already failed to achieve in Wu Han.

The Canton uprising of December 1927 had no political perspective and expressed proletarian resistance no more than the KTT expressed proletarian aspirations. Borodin, the Government's Russian adviser, said that he had come to China to fight for an idea; it was for similar political ideas that the KTT sacrificed the workers

of Canton. These workers never seriously challenged Chiang Kai-shek and the right-wing of the KMT; the only serious, systematic and sustained challenge came from the peasantry.

23. After his victory Chiang Kai-shek found himself master of a country in which the insoluble contradictions of the traditional social system had produced social chaos. The Nanking government saw before it the task of re-organising China, but it was impossible to turn the clock back.

Chiang Kai-shek was obliged to embark on new roads and was ready to do so. He dreamt of being, if not the Jacobin, at least the Girondin reformer of China, just as Kerensky had dreamt of being the great reformer in the Russian revolution. Kerensky, like a comic opera hero, had strutted across the Russian political scene between February and October 1917, believing he could dominate events, whereas in fact it was events that were carrying him forward.

Chiang Kai-shek can be compared to Kerensky in several ways: neither had much criticism to make of imperialism: both were faced with agrarian problems which resulted in the basic instability of their regimes; both became puppets of reaction as a result of their own ideals. Kerensky's 'socialist' beliefs (the word can be interpreted in many ways!) led him to become the ally and friend of many of the most reactionary elements in Russia. Chiang Kai-shek who, as a cadet in the military academy, had dreamt of 'renewing China with his sword' in his own lifetime, eventually became a member of a clique of whom T.V. Soong was the most typical member. But the wealth of Soong\* (\* in fact, Chang's father-in-law) and other large

financiers presupposes both a form of commercial imperialism and the mass poverty of the Chinese peasantry. Kerensky's policies were similarly dictated by the social position of his friends, such as Nekressov, a position based on the poverty of the Russian peasantry. While Kerensky's government in Russia lasted only a few months, the Chinese 'Kerensky' period of the KMT lasted until World War II.

24. Although the accession to power of Chiang Kai-shek impeded the progress of the bourgeois revolution, the revolution had already begun and the main revolutionary force, the mass of the peasantry, continued to press forward. In the early thirties, scarcely three years after the country had been 'pacified', there was a series of peasant insurrections. Thus the KMT armies were fighting against the revolutionaries-the peasantry -who had been continually oppressed and cheated and were now being driven to extremes of desperation.

Wherever the masses took action they undertook a general partition of the land. This partition was so radical in the province of Kiangsi that the KMT were forced to legitimate it when they 'pacified' the rebellious area in 1934, although such land reform was scarcely in accord with their general policy. Chiang Kai-shek had declared, it is true, that he intended to regulate land ownership so that each could have his share, but outside Kiangsi where the partition was imposed by peasants themselves no such reforms took place.

The KMT claimed that co-operatives would improve the living standards of their participants and, although the number of such co-operatives rose from 5,000 to 15,000 between 1933 and 1936,

they only in fact served the interests of the land-owners. The Swedish anthropologist Jan Myrdal, who lived for a time in a country village in Shansi, recorded that the peasants themselves had told him that the credit system brought them further into poverty. Their debts to the landlords increased and the troops of the KMT enforced payment. Such conditions, as recorded by Myrdal, lend weight to the assertion that the revolution which smouldered throughout the thirties to explode in the forties was overwhelmingly a peasant revolution.

25. The Nanking government under Chaing Kai-shek failed to resolve China's most urgent problem, that was the agrarian problem. Their incapacity in this field stemmed from the close links between the KMT and those sections of Chinese society whose interests most favoured the maintenance of the traditional system. The overt and direct oppression of the peasantry under this system was of a distinctly pre-bourgeois nature and showed that remnants of feudalism were still in existence.

Here can be found the source of the increasing corruption within the KMT: such corruption was not the result of personal characteristics of the KMT leaders but of the social system itself. The KMT was not corrupted because it sought support from the propertied classes but by the fact that it was based on such classes. This corruption greatly exacerbated the social problems of China. The Nanking government and the parasitical classes which it represented held back development and tended to destroy China's economy.

But once this economy was challenged the government itself was doomed. After twenty years of tentative attempts, the peasant

masses at last discovered how to unite in a revolutionary force. It was not the working class, still very weak, which brought about the downfall of Chiang Kai-shek but the peasant masses, organised under primitive democracy into guerilla armies. This demonstrates another fundamental difference between the Chinese and Russian revolutions. In the latter the workers were at the head of events at Petrograd, Moscow and Kronstadt, and the revolution progressed outward from the towns into the countryside. In China the opposite was the case. The revolution moved from rural to urban areas. When Kerensky called upon the army to help him against revolutionary Petrograd, his soldiers fraternised with the Bolsheviks. But when the armies of Mao Tse Tung and Lin Piao approached the Yangtse river, the peasant soldiers of the KMT deserted en masse. There was no question of a defence of Nanking or of the China of Chiang Kai-shek. The spectre of feudalism was driven out of China and capitalism was bloodily born there, the result of a social caesarean section carried out with the bayonets of peasant armies.

### [Land Partition and the Agrarian Revolution](#)

26. As a peasant revolution, the Chinese revolution showed its bourgeois character as clearly as did the Russian revolution. When the peasants began to move, Lenin and his colleagues were forced by events to abandon their ideas on the 'agrarian question'. They adopted the Narodnik policy based on the so-called 'black partition' under the slogan of 'the land to the peasants'. In China the KTT used a similar slogan, also borrowed from others (notably from Sun Yat Sen) and which, as in Russia, had been similarly forced upon them by reality itself.

27. In 1926 the two childhood friends from the province of Honan,

Mao Tse Tung and Liu Shab Chi, both strictly followed the Party doctrine. The former wrote in a study of the old class structure in China that 'the industrial proletariat is the motive force of our revolution'. The latter wrote in a pamphlet that 'the social and democratic revolution can only succeed under the leadership of the workers' unions'.

The ink was scarcely dry, however, when the peasants of Honan challenged such opinions with an irresistible force. Deeply impressed by what he had seen during a short visit to his native province, Mao Tse Tung came to believe that it was not the workers but the peasants who would be at the forefront of the revolution. He wrote in a report that, 'without the poor peasants there can be no question of a revolution'. Whoever acted against the peasants attacked the revolution; their revolutionary tactics were beyond reproach.

28. Mao Tse Tung depicted in great detail the revolutionary tactics of the peasants of Honan in a report on the revolutionary movement in that province. These tactics were used throughout China as much during the long 'Kerensky period' as in 1949 and in 1953. The houses of village tyrants were invaded by crowds, their corn confiscated and their pigs slaughtered. Landowners were dressed up as clowns and paraded through the villages as prisoners; meetings were held at which the poor expressed their grievances against the rich, and tribunals were set up to try exploiters. These were the methods of struggle spontaneously developed by the Chinese peasants. In China, just as in Russia, it was not the party which showed the way to the peasants-the peasants showed the way to the party.

29. The social changes which occurred in the Chinese countryside between 1949 and 1953 were characterised by partition of the land, the dispossession of the landowners, the breaking up of the social groups connected with them and, finally, by the destruction of the patriarchal family which was the basic production unit of traditional Chinese society. The social significance of this process was that it put an end to the old system which was in decline and seriously hindered the development towards private ownership of land (the most important means of production in China).

The result was the same in China as it had been in Russia. Those who had been landless peasants became small land-owners. After four years of agrarian revolution, there were between 120 and 130 million independent peasants in China.

30. Of the development of Russia after 1917, Karl Radek had written, 'the Russian peasants have made the feudal land on which they worked until now their own property'. This remains the basic fact although it can be partly concealed by various juridical fictions. The Bolshevik economist, Vargas, wrote in 1921, 'the land is worked by peasants who produce almost as private owners'. Radek and Vargas were absolutely correct.

The first phase of the Russian revolution produced capitalist private ownership in the countryside, which naturally led to new social differentiations. A new class of agricultural labourers developed alongside a class of well-to-do peasants. Of similar developments in China, Mao Tse Tung was to write in 1955: 'in recent years the spontaneous forces of capitalism \* have expanded day by day in the countryside; new rich peasants" have appeared everywhere



and a large number of well-to-do peasants are trying desperately to become rich. On the other hand, a large number of poor peasants still live in misery and poverty because the means of production are insufficient. Some of these poor peasants are in debt while others are selling or letting their land.' Later, in the same article, Mao writes of 'a group of well-to-do peasants who are developing towards capitalism'

31. Partition of the land created, both in Russia and China, the conditions under which agriculture could enter the sphere of modern commodity production. Such a system of commodity production arose in Western Europe under the form of classical capitalism. In such a system there no longer exist the closed units in which needs are fulfilled by local labour alone and in which production is geared to local consumption. A peasant no longer consumed all his own production nor produced for the satisfaction of all his own needs. Specialisation developed and the peasant began to work for the market just as industry did.

The peasant supplied industry with primary products and the non-agrarian industrial workers with food. In return, industry supplied the peasant with the machinery to improve and increase production. This specialisation led to an increasing inter-dependence between agriculture and industry.

In Russia and China this type of development also took place, but not along classical lines. Both these countries lacked a modern bourgeoisie which is the historical agent of this type of social change. Its historical role had been taken over by the party and the state. The development towards capitalism in these two countries

was also the development towards state capitalism. At first it might appear as if this development was the product of a supposedly 'socialist ideology. On closer inspection, however, it appears that state capitalism was not the result of such an ideology but rather that this 'socialist' ideology was the consequence of the new inevitability of state capitalism.

32. Because state capitalism implies a restriction of 'free' market mechanisms and of the traditional 'freedoms' of the producer, it encountered both in China and in Russia the resistance of peasants who had just established themselves as free producers. The historical need to overcome this resistance inevitably resulted in a Party dictatorship.

The climate of resistance among the Chinese peasantry is clearly demonstrated in an episode described in the Party's theoretical journal in 1951 as follows: 'The young Liu Shao-chi had worked as a farm labourer for more than ten years. During this time he had suffered from bitter poverty. It was not until the victory of the revolution that he was able to marry and start a family. During the campaign for agricultural reform he was very active and was elected secretary of his village youth league. Once he had received land however he refused to continue working for the Party. When reproached, he replied: "All my life I've been poor. I owned no land. Now I own land, I'm content. There is no need for further revolution".' The Party replied that the revolution had not yet ended. The revolution could not be ended until a modern, stable economy had been established without which, despite the land partition, agriculture would once again stagnate.

## [The peasants against State Capitalism](#)

33. In 1953, when the agrarian revolution was under way that is to say, after the partition of land had taken place, China saw the onset of a violent struggle between the peasants and the KTT. The object of this was the building of a state capitalist economy. Alongside this development there arose also increasing tensions between the workers and the government.

In these two respects, events in China in the fifties resembled events in Russia in the twenties. But events in the two countries were by no means identical. China witnessed nothing like the development of workers' councils or the growth of these tendencies of self-management in the Russian factories which had forced Lenin to adopt the slogan of 'All Power to the Soviets', despite this being in its essence, in opposition to Bolshevik ideology.

Nevertheless, similarities can be seen underlying, on the one hand, the decision of the First All-Russian Congress of Councils of National Economy (in May 1918) to the effect that eventual nationalisation of the factories could only be undertaken with the consent of the Supreme Council of National Economy\* (\* See "The Bolsheviks and Workers Control p. 43), or the decree of the 10th Party Congress of March 1921 which forbade the further confiscation of enterprises, and, on the other hand, the Chinese measures introduced in September 1949 forbidding even workers in the private sector from striking.

While the Russian proletariat were developing new methods of struggle, the Chinese proletariat were resorting to the classical strike weapon. But in both countries legislation was directed at the self-activity of the workers. Behind the thin facade of the so-called 'dictatorship of the proletariat' could be found, in both countries, the

features of capitalism.

34. In both China and Russia there was a contradiction between the claims of the Bolshevik Party and social reality. In relation to the trade unions, this led to a 'discussion' in which the truth was meticulously avoided even when the facts were fairly clear.

In 1952 the Chinese unions were purged of officials who, it was stated, 'allowed themselves to be led too much by the workers', i.e. who 'showed too much concern over the workers living standards', or who 'proved overzealous in ensuring workers' rights'. Meetings were called at which attacks were made on those who 'failed to understand that, while strikes are necessary in a capitalist country, they are superfluous in a socialist state'. A campaign was launched against 'laxity in labour discipline', in much the same tone as Trotsky had used in Russia. General Hou Chi Chen, who had elaborated the new trade union laws, declared: 'It is no longer necessary, as it once was, to struggle for the downfall of capitalism.'

In 1953, at the 7th Congress of Chinese Trade Unions, it was stated that 'the direct and selfish interests of the working class must be subordinated to those of the state'.

Although in China too debate clouded reality, at the 1953 Congress of Trade Unions the truth was stated far more bluntly than it had ever been in Russia.

35. That the Chinese Party could express itself more openly than its Russian counterpart was a direct result of the different situations existing in the two countries. In Russia the realities of Bolshevik ideology had to be more carefully hidden as a result of the more

important role played by the working class in that country. After all, the Bolshevik regime in Russia had known a 'Workers' Opposition' based on the trade union of metalworkers and an armed proletarian insurrection at Kronstadt.

No such pressures had been put upon the Chinese Bolshevik Party. As a result it had fewer compunctions in dealing with the working class and could consequently allow itself a freer hand in coping with the peasantry. Until the early thirties the Russian Party vacillated between the workers and the peasants, at times acting against one section while giving way to the other. From the beginning of the revolution the Chinese Party could follow a straight line. As a result, it could develop a stronger state capitalist policy in relation to agriculture, and moreover do so at an earlier date.

36. From the moment of the Bolshevik victory in China the working class was weaker than that in Russia. Agriculture was more primitive and therefore more dependent on industry. As a result the Party had more elbow room and met with more success in its agrarian policy. In October 1953 the Party began to fight against the private capitalist tendencies which had resulted from the partition of the land. Three and a half years later, in 1957, ninety per cent of Chinese agriculture had been organised into co-operatives. This first period of collectivisation was followed, in August 1959, by a second phase: the introduction of the Peoples' Communes. This second phase of collectivisation had only been going a few months when it encountered a massive and menacing resistance from the peasantry. In Russia the Bolsheviks had met this resistance earlier.

37. In China, the struggle between the peasantry and the state

party reached its peak later than its corresponding struggle in Russia. As a result of China's larger number of peasants, the struggle proved more deeply rooted and more dangerous to the new state. In Russia the ideological repercussions of this conflict did not occur until long after the peasant uprisings had been suppressed: it was not until 1925 that Bukharin issued his famous appeal to the peasants, 'Enrich yourselves!' In China the order of events proved quite different. The peasant uprisings occurred in December 1958 in Honan, Hopeh, Kansu, Kiangsi and Kuangtung provinces but the ideological struggle had taken place two and a half years before in the period between the two periods of agrarian collectivisation known as the 'Hundred Flowers' period.

38. It is quite wrong to see the resistance against the Mao regime during the 'Hundred Flowers' period as a preliminary to the events of the Red Guards period of the Cultural Revolution. During the 'Hundred Flowers' period it was the Party which found itself the accused, denounced for suppressing individual liberty and creating a division between itself and the people; in short of 'behaving like a new dynasty', as a spokesman of the opposition put it. The Party was being accused by people who, consciously or not, reflected the aspirations of the small agricultural producers. During the Cultural Revolution, instead of being the accused, the Party was then the prosecutor and the accusations it leveled were not the suppression of individual liberties but an overindulgence in personal liberty. While the 'Hundred Flowers' period was a struggle against the party's state capitalist attitudes, the Cultural Revolution-as will be shown-was a conflict between the Party and the 'new class'.

In China this 'new class' developed more quickly than in Russia.

One of the main reasons for this was the ability of the KTT to move more quickly and more strongly towards state capitalism in the first years that followed its victory. In China many of the most profound social changes occurred sooner after the revolution than in Russia. As is often the case in history, what was initially a brake became a stimulus to further development.

### [The Period of the Hundred Flowers' and the policy of 'Three Red Flags'](#)

39. In the middle of January 1956 the Chinese Bolshevik Party held a conference during which it decided to change its policy with regard to scientists and writers. Chou En-lai, the Prime Minister, promised the intellectuals better treatment, admitted that a gap had developed between the Party and the intellectuals, and conceded that this could partly be blamed on Party officials. On 21 March 1956 the 'People's Daily' wrote that the Party should make greater attempts than ever to rally the intellectuals back to its ranks. By 'intellectuals' they were referring to the new intellectuals rather than to the old political idealists who formed the Party cadre and who belonged to the intelligentsia. At the same time open attempts were made to persuade Chinese intellectuals abroad to return home. On 2 May 1956 Mao Tse Tung made his famous speech in which he said 'Let a Hundred Flowers bloom and a Hundred Schools of Thought contend'. Thus began the 'Hundred Flowers' period. It was pure coincidence that it began at the same time as the 'thaw' in Russia or as the Polish 'spring in autumn'. This coincidence was to lead to a misconception that these were similar phenomena.

40. Misunderstandings were heightened by the fact that in China too people used the word 'spring'. If however a comparison with this

Chinese 'spring' is to be sought, it will not be found in the European developments of the fifties but rather in the Russian events of early 1918. In March of that year Lenin proclaimed the need to attract people from the professions. In 1921 and in the following years of the NEP relations between the Bolsheviks and the scientists and specialists steadily improved until they once more came under attack from Stalin.

In 1928 the first famous trial took place in Russia against certain engineers. The event in some ways resembled the purges of the thirties but was in essence different. Trials also took place in China, for example that against the author Hou Fu, widely read in this period. That cases such as this occurred before even the beginning of the 'Hundred Flowers' period only demonstrates how complex reality is and how, beyond all the analogies, there remain profound differences between the Chinese events and those of Russia.

41. Despite these differences, the 'Hundred Flowers' period in China can be compared to the NEP in Russia. Changes in economic policy took place in China during this period—namely, a pause between the two periods of collectivisation. In Russia this period lasted ten years if dated from Lenin's change of policy towards the intellectuals, or seven years if dated from the formal adoption of the NEP on 21 March 1921. As a result of her backwardness, China's corresponding phase was to prove much shorter, but did not occur until six and a half years after the Bolshevik victory. The systematic building of state capitalism, for which both countries needed intellectuals, began later in China, which was a more backward country; but, once begun, the process continued at a faster tempo as the Chinese did not need to make



the detours that were forced on Lenin (see thesis 35).

42. The period of the 'Hundred Flowers' lasted only a year. While the hundred flowers were flowering and the hundred schools of thought were contending, comments of the following kind could be read in China: 'When the Communists entered the town in 1949 they were welcomed by the people with food and drink and they were regarded as liberators; now the people keep clear of the Communist Party as if its members were gods or devils. Party members behave as police agents in civilian clothing and spy on the people.' Or: 'The unions have lost the support of the masses because they side with the Government at decisive moments.'

To dissatisfaction such as this must be added that caused by a low standard of living and by widespread hunger. One cannot help recalling that Kollontai had said in Russia in the early twenties that the bars of the prison cells were the sole remaining symbols of soviet power-or how the Workers' Opposition had criticised the economic situation. But in China the working class was still weak. No workers' opposition had appeared. The reality of the situation, namely the defence of the liberty of peasant entrepreneurs against the state capitalist tendencies of the Party, was better expressed in the literary critiques of the 'Hundred Flowers' period than it had been by pamphleteers during the NEP. In Russia this had been mixed up with a primitive proletarian critique-something which did not occur in China.

43. The Hundred Flowers' period was in no way related to the events in Russia or Poland after the death of Stalin. Nor was it related to the critique which began in China in the early sixties

despite the fact that in a number of instances the Party was the common object of these criticisms. In the 'Hundred Flowers' period the Party was criticised because it was state capitalist; in the sixties it was criticised despite its state capitalist position. Whereas in the 'Hundred Flowers' period the critics were against both state capitalism and the Party, in the sixties the critics were against Mao Tse Tung but not in the least against state capitalism. Behind these apparent subtleties there lay important differences.

44. In 1957 while the seed of the 'Hundred Flowers' was germinating in the fertile soil of the existing social relations, the Party replied to criticism by a sharp campaign against 'right-wing deviationists' which lasted until April 1958. Then in the summer of that year, the Party announced its policy of the 'Three Red Flags' which it had been preparing for some months.

-The first 'red flag' was the 'general policy of socialist construction: the joint development of industry and agriculture by the simultaneous utilisation of modern and traditional productive methods.

-The second 'red flag' was the 'great leap forward': the attempt vastly to increase the production of steel and power.

-The third 'red flag' was the formation of 'peoples' communes' throughout the countryside as the second phase of agrarian collectivisation.

From this it can be seen that after the short 'Hundred Flowers' period the Party continues on its state capitalist course more decisively than ever. China was now at the stage that Stalin's

Russia had reached in 1928, eleven years after the Bolshevik revolution. China had taken nine years to reach this stage. Her development had been more rapid and the methods used more radical.

Such 'progress' however was not achieved without trouble. When towards the end of 1958 the 'weapon of critique' of the 'Hundred Flowers' period was discarded and the peasants took the road of a 'critique by weapons', the Party had to back-pedal. In December 1958, April 1959, and on several subsequent occasions, the Party had to modify its 'Communes' programme before eventually abandoning it in 1962. A similar fate met the other two 'red flags'. In the spring of 1962 the policy of the 'Three Red Flags' was completely abandoned.

45. History repeats itself, but in ever new forms. In Russia there was a fairly strong peasant resistance at the beginning of 1921. The Party took a step back and announced the NEP, only to renew its fight against this resistance in 1928. In China phenomena similar to the NEP were witnessed in 1956-7, after which the Party began a struggle against the peasants which resulted in uprisings similar to those seen in Russia in 1921. The Chinese Party then back-pedaled as Lenin had in 1921. What resembled the NEP in China therefore took place in two distinct periods, the 'Hundred Flowers' period and the period between 1962 and 1964 when a new 'radical' course was again set. But the Chinese events of 1964 no longer resembled what happened in Russia at the end of the NEP. At best they resembled the second phase of a delayed NEP. A new conflict was then beginning, not between the Party and the peasantry but between the Party and a 'new class'.

## The 'New Class' in China against the KTT

46. In the mid-sixties China entered a new phase which the Party called the 'Great Socialist Cultural Revolution'. In a three-volume work published in the autumn of 1966 it was stated that, 'The victory of the socialist revolution does not mean the end to a class society or to the class struggle'. The authors went on to say that after the proletariat had established its power through a political victory, there were other struggles to be fought in the fields of culture, literature, art, philosophy, life-style and everyday conduct. It was because of this that China had been involved in inter-class struggle on the cultural front since 1949.

This is a typical example of Bolshevik mystification: there had not been a socialist revolution and power was not in the hands of the proletariat. Instead there had been a bourgeois revolution which, as a result of specific historical circumstances, had been carried out by the peasantry. It had taken the form of state capitalism and had subsequently evolved a very unusual ideology. This ideology required a presentation of the facts in such a manner as to imply that, from the outset, the capitalist nature of the revolution had rapidly become socialist. This sleight of hand boils down to the fact in China, as in Russia, state capitalism is presented as 'socialism' and the power of the Party as 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'.

The new ideology also develops the false idea that, after its allegedly political victory, the working class has yet other victories to win. But the real power of the working class, as of any other class, does not lie in political institutions but is of a social nature. It implies above all a revolution in the relations of production, associated with a revolution in all other relationships. In China the relations of

production changed. Feudalism was replaced by capitalism. As earlier in Europe, one system of exploitation was replaced by another. As long as revolutions in relations of production only result in one form of exploitation replacing another, they will result in the emergence of institutionalised political power. When a change in the relations of production does away with exploitation, political power will cease to exist. One cannot speak of political domination by the proletariat where the proletariat is still exploited. Once the proletariat frees itself, all forms of exploitation and of class domination will cease.

The concept according to which the 'political power of the proletariat must be used to win victory in the cultural field' is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the link between relations of production on the one hand and political and cultural relations on the other. These wrong ideas arose from the fact that the respective roles of the social and economic infrastructure of society and of its political and cultural superstructure were reversed.

Cultural and economic changes are not brought about by the instrument of politics but come about when the economic foundations of society are being transformed. The opposite is learnt if-as is the case of Russia and China-reality too is violated and wage-slavery is presented as the opposite of what it really is. The 'Great Socialist Cultural Revolution', we would stress, had nothing to do with socialism. Nor was it in any real sense a revolution.

47. What the KTT labeled as a 'cultural revolution' led, in late 1966 and in early 1967, to violence on such a wide scale that the world spoke of a 'civil war'. It should not be thought however that these

are mutually contradictory categories. Cultural developments, historically, have often been violent. In our opinion there is a direct link between the conflicts expressed in art and literature in the early sixties and the violence which broke out in later years. The Chinese scholars and literary critics fought for essentially the same things as were later to be fought for physically. As so often in history, and as has previously been seen in Chinese history itself (see Thesis 44), an ideological struggle preceded an armed struggle.

It was no coincidence that the work already mentioned on the 'cultural revolution' dealt only with literature. The KTT were not wrong in emphasising the relationship between the struggle of the Red Guards and the earlier literary struggle. They were wrong, however, in their distorted view of that relationship. The struggle of the Red Guards did not have a cultural objective. The opposite was the case. The cultural struggle expressed conflicting social interests. The Chinese Bolsheviks failed to appreciate the opposing social interests precisely because they were Bolsheviks and limited by Bolshevik ideology. They described the conflicts of 1966-67 as 'cultural' instead of explaining these conflicts in the field of culture as stemming from antagonistic social interests.

48. The French journal *Le Contrat Social* (edited by the Institute of Social History in Paris), called the 'Great Socialist Cultural Revolution' a 'pseudo-cultural pseudo-revolution'. This might appear to coincide with our viewpoint. We have said it was wrong to explain social conflicts through cultural mechanisms. We have said that there was no 'revolution' at this period. This is true, but the writer in the French journal meant something else. By 'pseudo-cultural', the French journal meant anti-cultural, and by 'pseudo-

revolution' it meant counter-revolution. But in China during the sixties there was neither a revolution nor a counter-revolution, neither physical nor literary. What happened was a conflict between the 'new class' as occurred in Russia after Stalin's death.

But there is an important and specific difference between the parallel developments in China and in Russia. In Russia there was the same upheaval but the defenders of the traditional type of Party were labeled 'anti-party', and the 'new class' won its victory easily and almost without violence. In China, where the Party was much stronger for historical reasons (see Theses 35 and 41), the 'new class' experienced more resistance and violence erupted. If in the fifties Molotov and those around him had succeeded in mobilising the Army against the Mikoyan faction, developments in Russia might have shown more resemblance to those in China.

49. The agitation of the Red Guards was no more than a reaction against an earlier action by the 'new class'. To grasp this one need only study the literary conflict that took place in the early sixties. Despite the fact that it was couched in literary terms, the true social nature of this conflict became clearly visible in January 1961 after the author Wu Han had published his novel *Hai Jui Dismissed from Office* (Peking Arts and Literature edition).

Although this dramatic story was to be severely criticised by the Party's official press several years later, the same author in 1961 published *Three Family Village* in collaboration with Teng To and Liao Mo Sha. Between January and August Teng To began a regular column entitled *Evening Tales from Jenchan* in a Chinese paper. These were short contemplations in the classical Chinese

style and apparently dealt with former periods of Chinese cultural prosperity. The allegorical nature of these articles is, however, transparently obvious and within the framework of depicting the Ming dynasty or old time's Chinese culture he was referring to the contemporary People's Republic of Mao Tse Tung and the KTT and aiming his blows against the Party dictatorship.

Teng To was undoubtedly the most brilliant of Mao's critics( and his works contain constant attacks on political fanatic-ism and persecution because of the disastrous effects they have/ on harmonious social and economic development. In his column Evening Tales of Jenchan dated 30 April 1961 Teng To further clarifies his position. The article is on 'the theory of the precious nature of labour power' and Teng To makes it clear that he considers the wasteful use of so 'precious' a commodity to be harmful to production. By such criticism Teng To distinguishes himself from the critics of the 'Hundred Flowers' period. He appears as something which previous critics were not, namely as the spokesman for a group with anundoubted interest in production. When in his Evening Tale of 22 April 1962 Teng To asks if one can base oneself on theory alone and tells the Party bureaucrats that 'people can't do things all alone', one must see it in the light of the 'new class' staking a claim to being heard and listened to.

50. The Party's tame critics claimed that writers such as Wu Han, Liao Mo Sha, and Teng To 'wanted to restore capitalism' in China. Such an accusation slots into the jargon of Bolshevik ideology but is patently absurd. Capitalism being the existing economic system, there was no need to 'restore' it. What was at most possible was that some Chinese preferred traditional liberal capitalism to the



state capitalism variant which existed in China.

Who then were the critics? Classical capitalism had made little headway in China and the embryonic classical bourgeoisie had been destroyed or exiled in the late forties. Its residual representatives are today to be found in Formosa or elsewhere. In the unlikely event that there are people in China who favour a return to the social relations of classical private capitalism, Teng To, Liao Mo Sha and Wu Han are not amongst them. While their enemies within the Party constantly publish long attacks on the works of these writers to prove their hostility to the current regime, nowhere in the quotes does any hostility appear towards the system of state capitalism. It is true that Three Family Village (the joint work of these three pilloried authors) contains a semi-overt attack on the 'people's communes', but these criticisms are neither of state capitalism nor of the Party, which was in fact itself now abandoning the 'communes' policy.

In Three Family Village Teng To criticises Mao's famous phrase, 'the east wind is stronger than the west wind' and Mao's characterisation of imperialism as a 'paper tiger'. Teng To's criticisms spring from his standpoint as a realist. When, in his Evening Tales, he attacks the KTT's general policy as being based on illusions, he is echoing his criticisms of the people's communes. In both instances he is expressing his preference for efficiency. Teng To does not treat history daintily and he attacks political idealists like Mao who try to channel the process of social development according to their own political wishes. In other words, Teng To and his fellow writers are not opposed to state capitalism, they are only opposed to the Party .

51. The story of Wu Han's novel *Hai Jui Dismissed from Office* concerns a party official who, despite his honesty, is sacked from his post because of divergent ideas. It is probable, as suggested by the author's critics within the Party, that the novel alludes to those who were expelled from, and persecuted by, the Party after the Lushan conference in 1959. The conclusion drawn by the critics was however that Wu Han was defending 'right-wing opportunists'. This relapse into the traditional jargon tells us nothing either about Hai Jui or about those expelled from the Party. The Party pen-pushers could only monotonously reiterate that the writers wanted to 'restore capitalism'.

If, however, nothing can be learned about Hai Jul, or about his creator Wu Han, from the criticisms of his detractors, much can be learned from the author's articles and letters which appeared after the publication of his book. Wu Han therein declares that he himself was among those who did practical work and kept in close touch with reality. Teng To expressed a similar preference for reality when he wrote in his *Evening Tales* column that 'those who believed that they could learn without a teacher would learn nothing'. The 'teacher' referred to by Teng To throughout his work is historical reality, the actual development of the productive process. It is precisely this type of criticism that identifies Wu Han and Teng To as spokesmen of the 'new class'.

52. In China the 'Great Socialist Cultural Revolution' was nothing more than an attempted self-defence by the Party against the increasing pressure of the 'new class'. Against the literary attacks of Teng To, Liao Mo Sha, Wu Han and others, the Party at first used purely literary weapons. The 'Thoughts of Chairman Mao' were

published in the famous 'little red book' in which are contained Mao's pronouncements on art and literature uttered at Yen-an in May 1942. When Mao said, in the forties, that 'writers must place themselves on the Party platform and must conform to Party policies', he meant something rather different than the use that was to be made of this phrase some twenty years later.

When the 'new class' changed its weapons the Party followed suit. The literary conflict between the 'new class' and the Party developed into a physical struggle. The stake in this struggle was just as obvious as in the previous literary phase. But there was a difference. Reality could be ignored on paper; in real life it could not. The 'new class' in China was a product of social development, just as it had been in Russia, and as such the Party felt obliged to defend it. This explains why, at a certain stage, Lin Piao had to hold back the Red Guards and why Mao Tse Tung himself had to call a halt to the 'Cultural Revolution'. What was at stake then was neither literature nor cultural affairs but production and the Chinese economy.

### [The KTT against the 'New Class'](#)

53. Information, both official and semi-official, on recent events in China is vague, contradictory, politically distorted and incomplete. Any attempt to build a social image of Mao's opponents, against whom the violence of the 'Cultural Revolution' was directed, confronts great difficulty. It is rather like the task the police undertake when it seeks to build up an 'identikit' picture from a mass of partial or incomplete testimonies. Doubtful and uncertain details must be discarded in favour of the features common to the many partial or inadequate reports. From these features can be

built up a composite mental image which, while lacking specificity, nevertheless demonstrates all the general, i.e. essential features. Such features provide a distinct and immediately recognisable frame work. Applying this method, Mao's adversaries are found:

-to be living in large and middle sized industrial towns (Chou En-lai said at a dinner in Peking on 14 January 1967, that it was in such towns that the Party first felt obliged to move against its opponents);

-to comprise, within their ranks, high Party officials and well-known men (speech by Chou En-lai and articles in the Peking People's Daily) and people in official positions (leader in the theoretical review Red Flag);

-to have fortified themselves in powerful positions (leader in People's Daily and Red Flag);

-to have some of their number in the management of the railways (articles in People's Paper and Red Flag);

-to be attempting to gain the workers' support by wage increases and the bestowing of social benefits and through the distribution of food and other goods (the People 's Daily and the Red Flag),

-to have interests closely tied to production (statement of a pro-Maoist group in Shanghai);

-to distinguish themselves from the masses through their dress and life-style, neither proletarian nor peasant (numerous street witnesses);

-expressing opinions characterised by the Maoists as 'economistic'; these opinions reflect the atmosphere of industrial life and come into head-on collision with the Maoist conception that 'political work forms the basis of economic work' (the People 's Daily and the Red Flag);

-to favour a policy which would, according to the Maoists, drive a wedge between the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (i.e. the dictatorship of the Party) and the 'socialist system' (i.e. state capitalism) (the People's Daily and the Red Flag).

From all that precedes, Mao's opponents give the impression of being a group with roots in industrial life and including many Party officials. They have financial influence and are in a position to allocate the products of industry (both food and other commodities). They have the power to grant wage increases and other social advantages. They can therefore be characterised as managers.

54. The clearer the picture of Mao's opponents becomes, the more readily are they identifiable as the 'new class'. The real social differences between them and the Party correspond exactly to the theoretical differences between Wu Han and Teng To on the one hand and the Party on the other. It is no coincidence that in the early sixties Wu Han was not only an author but also assistant mayor of the large industrial town of Shanghai. Neither is it a coincidence that in the mid-sixties the mayor of Shanghai was one of those fighting the Party with more than a pen. Their so-called 'economism' was the atmosphere they encountered every day in the industrial climate of Shanghai.

The intervention of the Chinese 'new class' (or managers) does as

much to clarify the attitudes of their literary predecessors as a study of the latters' writing does to clarify the practical activities of the Chinese managers. The charge that the managers wanted to sever the links between the Party and the economic system shows that the managers-just like the writers-were not directing their blows against state capitalism as such but against the power of the Party. They did not consider the two as inseparable. They wished to destroy the stifling influence of the Party, not to abolish state capitalism. In fact, they believed that state capitalism could only prosper once freed of the political fetters of the doctrines of Mao Tse Tung and of the KTT.

55. When the 'new class' is proposing in China is a different conception of the Party, in other words an entirely different kind of Party from that conceived of by Mao Tse Tung.

During his visit to London, Kosygin, the Russian Premier, said that the Russian government sympathised with Mao's adversaries in China. This declaration fits in perfectly with our analysis of Chinese events. It was not the 'ideological conflict' with which the Russian leaders sympathised. What they identified with was the struggle of the managers of the 'new class' against the traditional Party. Their sympathy for the 'new class' stemmed from the fact that such a class had already proved victorious in Russia, personified by such manager-administrator types as Kosygin and Mikoyan.

In Russia the old style Bolshevik Party had been replaced by a Party of a new type. This gives us an insight into the objectives of the anti-Maoists in China. However, despite similarities, one must constantly stress that events had developed differently and at

different tempos in the two countries.

56. In Russia the traditional, old style Party and the 'new class' were natural enemies. This was not the case in China where, because the proletariat had always been weak, the Party had not been forced to pay as much heed to the workers as had its Russian counterpart. As a result the Chinese Party had a freer hand. Its policies were more drastic and direct (see Thesis 35). It moved faster and more confidently towards state capitalism. This is why the Chinese Party differed from its Russian counterpart and why in China the borderlines between the Party and the 'new class' are less easy to discern.

Mao's opponents are so strong, even within the Party itself, that at an Executive Conference held early in 1967 only six of the eleven present supported Mao. In Russia the 'new class' came to power imperceptibly, the traditional Party having proved an anachronism. In China the rise of the 'new class' has been associated with struggle for control of the Party.

57. This struggle for the Party in China makes the situation more complex. Definitions such as 'old-style Party' and 'new-style Party' mean different things in the Chinese and in the Russian contexts. While the 'new class' in China is seeking to escape from the stranglehold of the Party, the Party is seeking to reform itself to ensure its continued domination over the managers. This gives rise to the totally erroneous impression that the 'Cultural Revolution' was directed against the Party, whereas in reality it was directed against the 'new class'. Such misunderstanding is heightened by the fact that it was Mao himself who first used the term 'new-style

Party'.

What Mao meant by this phrase is the very opposite of what is represented by the 'new-style Party' in Russia, correctly seen by Mao as the instrument of the 'new class'. Mao sought to make the 'new-style Party' a barrier to the advance of the 'new class'. In Russia the 'new class' rebelled against the power of the traditional Party; in China the Maoists rose up against a Party structure in which they found their own power too circumscribed. Whereas in Russia the development of the 'new class' was compared to the 'thaw', in China Mao wanted to prevent the occurrence of such a 'thaw'. To this end he used the Red Guards, who threw China into turmoil. Yet despite this result of their intervention, its real purpose was to 'freeze' the social relations.

58. We have sought to analyse the social characteristics of Mao's opponents, but we hope it will be realised that every detail cannot be fitted into this analytical framework. Information leaking out of China concerning battles between Red Guards and workers for the control of several factories in Manchuria confirms no doubt that the 'Proletarian Cultural Revolution' was neither proletarian nor a revolution. But no one will assert. we hope, that the workers who fought Mao's Red Guards were managers or members of the 'new class'.

One does not think of the managers either when one looks at the 1967 uprising against Mao Tse Tung in the capital city of Kiangsi province. The movement took the name 'The First of August Movement' in reference to the time, forty years earlier, when organisations were briefly formed in that part of China on the model



of workers' councils, these had played a part in the conflict between the left and right wings of the Kuo Min Tang.

Still more difficult to place is the Chinese head of state, Liu Shao Chi who, even within the Party, had always held an independent position. The Maoists of the 'cultural revolution' call him their enemy, but Liu himself takes care to distinguish himself from all other opponents of Mao. It is obvious that many different developments are occurring simultaneously in China. But although reality is more complex than any abstract schema, the exceptions do not contradict the rule. Whatever the forces may have been against which the Red Guards and the 'cultural revolution' were unleashed, the situation can only be understood by the appearance on the scene of the 'new class', with its own indisputable claims.

59. The 'new class' in China did not appear from nowhere. It was the product of the development of specific social relationships in that country, just as previously it had developed in Russia from similar social relations. This explains two facts: firstly the endurance and obstinacy of the struggle against Mao which is continually breaking out in new places; secondly the repeated calls to order made to the Red Guards for moderate action without too much violence. These phenomena are related to one another and are both connected with the economy. Millions of Red Guards cannot be withdrawn from industry and education (i.e. from the preparation for future industrial knowledge, and therefore the preparation of the industry of the future) and be mobilised against the 'new class' without severely disorganising industrial development. As soon as the Red Guards are directed anew into production, industrial development is stimulated. Likewise the 'new class' is also

stimulated.

60. From the preceding Theses one can conclude that the so-called 'cultural revolution' is not another step towards state capitalism as has been claimed. On the contrary: the struggle of the KTT is directed against the very requirements of state capitalism in full development. The Chinese 'cultural revolution' was a struggle by the Party to defend itself, a struggle against the 'new class' produced by state capitalism, a struggle against attempts to adapt the political apparatus to the reality of social conditions. It cannot be predicted what forces either the Party or the 'new class' will be able to mobilise. Even in China no one can prognosticate on this matter. But in the final analysis, this is not the issue. How many times the Party can still win is not fundamental. What is important is whether it will be the managers or the political bureaucrats who will wield power in the conditions of state capitalism. This can be predicted without the pressures and balances of the moment. In the social, historical and economic framework of state capitalism, the ultimate victory of the 'new class' is the only logical perspective .

## [Footnotes](#)

1. The full text of Chou En-lai's message was published too in the New Left Review July/August 1971.
2. The suggestion of the ingenious Maoist is reprinted in the same issue of the New Left Review p 39.
3. When this essay had been written, the provisional result of the Pakistan events was yet unknown. Neither was there any question of China's latest approach to Japan. The explanations/ above, I believe, can hardly be changed by those facts.