

# Mao and Self-Limiting Cultural Revolution

By Richard Smith

(This is the second part of a two-part article on the "Crisis of Maoism")

We set out, in the first part of this article (in ATC, Summer 1981), to consider what went wrong with the political perspectives that governed the Chinese revolution in the Mao period. We started with the conception that Mao was a revolutionary, but that his practice and theory, were self-contradictory. Mao's revolutionary theory, based around the ideas of "mass line" style politics, mass mobilization, permanent "class struggle; the "two-line struggle" to socialism, and so forth—aimed to make possible the transition to socialism in China *without* the accompanying deradicalization, degeneration, in a word, the bureaucratization which befell the Russian revolution. Yet today, despite substantial economic development and despite unparalleled anti-bureaucratic campaigns, China's bureaucratic ruling class is now more firmly consolidated and entrenched than ever.

How could this have happened? Many western analysts in the Maoist tradition—perhaps foremost among them, the economists Charles Bettelheim and Paul Sweezy, explain this result as a degeneration of the revolution brought about by an *ideological* shift, a retreat from Mao's *political line*. The post-Mao leadership they argue, abandoned Mao's "socialist line": egalitarianism, moral incentives, the emphasis on building "Socialist Men and Women", to a "bourgeois line": the subordination of politics to economics and production, the reemphasis on material incentives, *thereby* fostering inequality, privilege and hierarchy, and with these, the degeneration of the revolution. For these analysts, in contrast to classical Marxist thought, a successful transition to socialism in China was seen to depend neither upon "objective conditions" such as developed productive forces, industrialization, nor upon the control of production and state power by the industrial working class itself through its own institutions of self-rule such as soviets or workers councils. Instead, what was crucial to Sweezy & Bettelheim was that the ruling party cadre remained *subjectively committed* to "socialist" or "proletarian" politics. Sweezy drew this line of argument out to its logical conclusion claiming that in third world countries today, the tasks of socialist, revolution and socialist construction have fallen to what he termed the "substitute proletariat": party organizations of revolutionaries recruited from a variety of classes, who become organized, disciplined and politicized in the common struggle of protracted revolutionary war, and compelled, in order to survive and succeed, to adopt "essentially proletarian attitudes and values": collectivism, egalitarianism, self-sacrifice, etc. The idea was that these values, imprinted in the heat of guerrilla warfare (and periodically renewed through "cultural revolutions"), would then carry *forward* to endow the revolutionary party with the capacity to revolutionize the whole society from above and complete the tasks of socialist industrialization at the same time.

We submitted this view to an extensive critique in which we argued that it was not so much the *retreat* from Mao's politics but rather those politics themselves, and particularly Mao's strategy

of cadre-led revolution and development, that actually promoted the rise and consolidation of the bureaucracy. Maoism we said, was based on a fundamentally utopian and idealist proposition: the notion that socialism could be built in China by a substitutionist party and in the absence of developed means of production. In rejecting the working class, replacing it by a substitutionist cadre party, and in rejecting a revolutionary internationalist strategy to favor of a strategy of autarkic socialist construction ("self-reliance"). Mao, we said, faced impossible contradictions: thus we said that if one started with the assumption that the party (and not the working class) is agent of socialist revolution, and that it was the cadres' job to remold the masses, then who would "revolutionize" the cadres? And if the cadres were vested with a monopoly of political and economic power, what would prevent them from using this power to follow their own material interests, to transform themselves into a new exploiting and ruling class? These were problems we said, that the "mass line" could not solve—problems that required real democratic control from below, by the working class.

Further, we argued that in the absence of an industrialized economy. Mao could not escape the need for "primitive accumulation" to get economic development. A strategy of self-industrialization meant the need to subordinate consumption to accumulation, and this required a repressive state. How could one simultaneously "squeeze" the direct producers and have popular power or socialist relations of production?

We traced the origins of these contradictions to their historical roots in the Communist Party's divorce from the Chinese proletariat in the late 1920's, and the decision by the Maoist wing of the Party to relaunch the revolution as a guerrilla war from a peasant base. That decision, we noted, had important consequences which profoundly shaped the character of the Party and its relationship to Chinese society down to the present day.

China's working class, though a minority, was organized and concentrated in modern industry, and involved in the national and international division of labor. It was to its *class interest* to aim at planning and running a national economy and to reach out for help internationally.

By contrast, although the peasantry provided the Party with an enormous reservoir of "revolutionary fighters!" its driving interests were petty bourgeois in that the whole thrust of the peasant movement was towards the division of the land, toward small property, etc. and not toward socialism, or even industrialization. *By itself*, the peasantry was incapable of posing a revolutionary *alternative* to the existing social order. Moreover, because the peasants were dispersed and sharply divided by sectional and local interests, they were incapable of organizing themselves as a coherent and cohesive national force.

So long as they confined themselves exclusively to this rural milieu, therefore, Mao and his comrades could look to the peasants' support but they could not look to the peasants to *lead* the revolution, much less to lead it in a socialist direction. So in this context, they were forced to make the party substitute for the working class, to construct an entirely new *subjectively socialist* force, distinct from the peasantry. This was the "substitute proletariat," the "vanguard party." We described how, in the nineteen thirties and forties, the Maoist leadership built this substitutionist party out of sections of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie: radical students, mutinous KMT soldiers, lumpen bandits, and eventually, the peasantry itself. But they organized them not *as producers* but by lifting their recruits up and *out* of the village life, detaching them from their former occupations, their former connection to production, and remolding them

through intense political education and military discipline into an independent social and political force—a party-army dedicated to fighting for the peasants' interests (against the landlords and the Japanese occupation armies) to the short run, but committed at the same time to a longer-run socialist program.

In our account of the Yen-an period, we tried to show how tendencies toward bureaucratization of the party were already "built-into" the party-mass relationship even to this early period.

These were rooted first to a basic contradiction between the peasants, especially the poorest peasants "blind" struggle for the land versus the Party's strategic need to hold the rural class struggle to check in order not to alienate the more productive richer peasants and landlords whose economy was crucial to support of the party-army.

Secondly, and of more fundamental importance, the peasants' petty bourgeois and localist interests ultimately conflicted with the Party's long-term national and socialist goals. We saw how Mao balanced these parallel and divergent tendencies through the development of "mass line" style politics. By sharing the poverty of the masses, by supporting the peasants struggle for the land, by educating the peasants and involving them to building peasant associations, rural cooperatives, women's organizations, etc., and by constructing extraordinarily uncorrupted rural governments, the Communists built an immense base of political and military support in the peasantry. But as we also pointed out, while mass line politics elicited the initiative and participation from below, it was at the same time, fundamentally *anti-democratic*. Peasants were encouraged to participate to local governments, in local elections, etc. but their participation and was limited mainly to implementation of Party policy and *criticism* of the performance of officials—rather than popular formulation of policy and control over cadres and officials. Real political power remained lodged at the top, to the hands of the cadre. And this was the problem. For as Mao found out, already to the Yen-an period, the cadre party was increasingly subject to elitist and bureaucratic tendencies. And in combating these tendencies he was handicapped by his own reluctance to help establish institutions of democratic control from below that could control the cadres. This, of course, was rooted in the Party's shift to the countryside. For again, whereas workers' democracy and socialism are compatible, and whereas workers' democracy is central to the prevention of bureaucratization, and to assure rational planning, equal distribution, etc., by contrast, the establishment of a *peasants* democracy would have meant no socialism and possibly no revolution. So long as the Party remained confined to this peasant milieu, it could not try to prevent bureaucratization by relying on bottom up democratic control, but had to rely on the cadres. Mao could and did try- to reform them through party "rectification" campaigns and through criticism from the masses, but in the last analysis he had to reinforce, indeed *strengthen* their objective position of power in the base areas, and thereby to reinforce at the same time, their bureaucratization.

Finally, we recalled how the Party's isolation from the international workers movement, and the years of rural guerrilla struggle tended to push the party in a nationalist and voluntarist direction. On the one hand, Stalin's efforts to subordinate the Chinese revolution to Russian state interests undermined the potential, in Mao's mind, of international solidarity and support. On the other hand, the successful experience of Yen-an "self-reliance" tended to promote in the minds of the leadership, an overestimation of the potentials of ideology and mass mobilization for socialist construction.

Thus, while it is quite true as Sweezy, Bettelheim and others have pointed out, that the experience of the Long March, the years of common struggle in revolutionary war, and the rectification campaigns all heightened the camaraderie, collectivist spirit, and dedication of the

cadre party-army, it was equally true (which Sweezy and Bettelheim et al. do *not* see) that this same experience also tended to reinforce the substitutionist party as a *bureaucratic* and *nationalist*, if as yet little privileged elite. By virtue of its self-organization and its command (within the base areas) of political and military, if not as yet economic power, the party cadre-bureaucracy already constituted *embryonically*, a potential ruling class.

With the victory of the revolution in 1949, the contradictions and tendencies latent in the pre-revolutionary period rapidly came to the fore. While the land reform and the expulsion of the old corrupt and imperialist-backed regime brought substantial improvements to China's masses, we noted the extraordinary swiftness with which the party cadres began to realize these class tendencies. When the CCP assumed power and the party-army became a party-state, it secured an unchallenged monopoly of political power, and through its "ownership" of the state, unchecked access to the income generated from state-owned industry and industrial and agricultural taxation. In this connection we recalled Mao's dismay, in 1957, at the way in which his party comrades had shed their guerrilla life-style and seemed far more interested in consolidating their positions of power and helping themselves to the social surplus than in "serving the people." We saw how, by the mid-1950's, cadre corruption and authoritarian rule, combined with the party's strategy of building socialism through forced surplus extraction, resulted in increasing alienation and popular disaffection from the party and government.

Thus peasants who had fought alongside the Communists to get rid of the landlords so that they could enjoy the fruits of their labor, now resisted the efforts of the state to take away their surpluses to fund accumulation for industrialization. As the state stepped up taxation and accumulation, they cut back on production. This provoked increasingly serious grain crises by the mid-fifties that brought widespread food shortages and undermined industrialization.

Likewise, workers' resistance began to appear taking the form of absenteeism, slowdowns, and ultimately, wide-spread strikes in 1955-6. This we argued, was largely due to the fact that workers were denied decision-making power on economic policies such as accumulation and distribution of the social surplus, had no say in formulation of national (or international) policies and priorities, and were subject to bureaucratic top-down control and harsh labor discipline. Lastly, we rounded out the picture of China's crisis in the mid-50's by indicating how bureaucratic-managerial self-interest, careerism and local particularism accounted for serious distortions and mismanagement of the economy by diverting surpluses to local projects or private use, thus undermining central planning and accumulation.

In response to the deepening crisis, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward in the winter of 1957-58. Recalling the spirit of Yen-an. Mao hoped to politically "re-revolutionize" the cadres and boost the commitment and involvement of the masses to break through the economic impasse by reviving the lessons of Yen-an "war communism": people over machines, mass mobilization, mass line style politics, egalitarianism, etc. As we saw, however, there was in fact, a vast difference between Yen-an and the Great Leap Forward. It was one thing to mobilize peasants in support of a party-army whose program, "land to the tiller" promised an immediate improvement in the peasants livelihood. But it was a quite different matter to convince peasants and workers in the GLF to *sacrifice* their living standards for accumulation and industrialization. Workers and peasants wanted industrialization for the improved living standards it could bring—but *not* if they had to pay for it with huge sacrifices in the present, and for a very long time to come. It was particularly difficult to get them to accept such sacrifices without *real popular*

*control* over these basic decisions about their lives, about how much for accumulation vs. consumption, about who should sacrifice and for how long, about where national priorities should be placed, etc.

In this respect we saw that Mao's efforts to overcome the alienation of the direct producers, to remove the barriers posed by entrenched and privileged managers and bureaucrats by encouraging bottom-up participatory leadership, criticism from below, and so forth, fell *far short* of what was really needed. We pointed out that here again, much as in the Yenan rectification campaigns, Mao mobilized the masses to *criticize* the bureaucracy and gave them free scope on the shop floor and in the communes to use their initiative and creativity to boost production. But he still stopped short of helping the masses, even the workers, to gain real democratic *control* over the cadre-managerial-bureaucracy, or over fundamental economic planning decisions beyond the shop floor. Yet without these two fundamentals, developed means of production and workers democratic control, "politics in command" turned everything into its opposite: Without imports of capital and modern machinery, the shift to mass mobilizations and "egalitarianism" rapidly exhausted the workforce and even, as we pointed out brought about a generalized depression of living standards. Without democratic planning processes, it was impossible for the leadership to get accurate information from below on resources and the productive capacities of workers, peasants, managers.

Consequently, top-down run campaigns such as the intensive farming and "backyard steel" campaigns, produced huge dislocations and massive waste. Further, without real democratic control from below over the cadres and managers, it proved impossible to enforce reforms and arrest the growth of the power and privileges of the bureaucracy. In the end, as we recalled, the Great Leap Forward crashed against a wall of resistance from China's peasants and workers. Confronted with the threat of economic collapse and peasant revolt, the state retreated in the early 60's. To get production going again, the government was forced to break up the agricultural communes, restore private plots and market incentives, and in industry, revert to material incentives and fall back on a newly strengthened technical-managerial elite.

Thus the overall results of the Leap were threefold: First, the peasants' successful resistance to communization sharply curtailed accumulation and put the brakes on the industrialization drive. Where, in 1958 Mao predicted that China would "catch up and overtake" Britain in fifteen years, by 1962, a much less confident Mao admitted that this might now take perhaps a century or more. Secondly, the restoration of the market and material incentive only reinforced the previous self-interested "economistic" approaches to production on the part of direct producers and accelerated social differentiation and growing inequality in every respect. Finally, political demobilization and the strengthening of managerial authority and privileges permitted the bureaucratic strata to emerge from the collapse of the Leap more strongly entrenched than ever before. By the early 1960's, Mao began to warn that China's bureaucracy was becoming a new "red bourgeoisie" as in Russia, and began to speak out on the need for still sharper "class struggle" to save the revolution and prevent its degeneration. The Great Leap Forward thus left unresolved all the contradictions of the system—indeed intensified them. How Mao would attempt to solve this new crisis is the subject to which we now turn.

## PART II

### From Cultural Revolution to the Shanghai Commune

Faced with a political and developmental crisis of far greater proportions than in the previous decade, Mao, in 1966, resolved to deepen and intensify the struggle by launching a new ideological offensive, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. But this time Mao started from a much weakened position. The ranks of his supporters had been sharply reduced, and Mao himself had been forced into semi-retirement in 1959 as a result of the disaster of the Great Leap Forward. To recapture the leadership and to revive the revolution, Mao had now to turn entirely *outside* the Party to mobilize new forces against the entrenched bureaucratic apparatus. Yet, characteristically, Mao did not turn to the workers —whom he viewed as part of the *problem*—but instead to the "uncorrupted" youth, the students.

In August 1966, Mao and his closest supporters, the so-called Cultural Revolution Group (CRG) which included his wife, Chiang Ch'ing, his personal secretary, Ch'en Po-ta, and leading radicals Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and Yao Wen-yuan, launched the "Red Guard" movement. Faced with pervasive corruption of his Party, Mao turned to mobilize the dynamism and revolutionary idealism of China's youth as his shock troops against his opponents in the bureaucracy. The students had many long-suppressed grievances. Many resented the way in which the government tried to solve its urban unemployment problem in the early sixties, the result of industrial retrenchment, by "sending down" to the countryside unemployable urban youth—often against their will. Many more resented the crushing suffocation of bureaucratic discipline and paternalism, especially over such issues as free speech, limited college enrollments and the lack of choice in job placements. Mao's famous "Sixteen Points" of August 1966 granted the students unprecedented freedoms: they were guaranteed free speech and protection from persecution by the party machine; they were urged to "drag out the handful of bourgeois rightists and counterrevolutionary revisionists who were" taking the capitalist road, "to denounce them via *Tatzipao* 'big character' posters, 'great debates' and 'cultural revolution committees and congresses.'" These committees and congresses, the declaration stated, were to be permanent standing mass organizations. They were *not* to displace party committees and state administrative structures but to parallel them.

Furthermore, to ensure that Mao's *direct* relationship to the masses would not be short-circuited by the bureaucracy through the usual bureaucratic procedures of appointment from above, the CRG insisted that these organizations, be *controlled from below* by the masses themselves, through the direct election and recall of all delegates "on the model of the Paris Commune" (point 9). This was a heretofore unheard of liberty. Finally, and not least of all, in a society where internal passports and extremely restricted mobility are the rule, the students were given the year off school and *carte blanche* for unrestricted rail travel throughout China to "exchange revolutionary experiences."

Now Mao's call for the masses to rebel against leaders of the ruling party, the party he himself had built and led to victory and presided over in the sixteen years since the revolution, was unprecedented to say the least—a register of the depth of his commitment to a radical revolutionary vision. Yet from the start he sought to define the *limits* of struggle, however ambiguously. The sixteen Point Decision made it unmistakably clear that the main danger of "bourgeois restoration" came from the Party itself, and explicitly defined the goal of the Cultural

Revolution" as the "overthrow" and "crushing" of "those within the Party who are in authority taking the capitalist road." Still "95%" of the Party cadres were declared to be "good to very good at the outset" (point 5). Of those to be struggled against, no one was to be "over-thrown" by *force* (point 6). Even more restrictive no one was to be criticized *by name* in the press without first getting prior permission of the local (or in some cases, higher level) party committees (point 11). Certain groups— scientists, technicians, white-collar workers were more or less exempted from the start (point 12) while the military and other sensitive sectors were declared off-limits to the Red Guards (point 15). Finally, and most importantly, while "making revolution" students were not to jeopardize production: "Any idea of counterposing the great cultural revolution to the development of production is incorrect" (point 14).<sup>48</sup>

Whatever else, the Sixteen Point Declaration presented a rather odd conception of "class struggle." The Cultural Revolution aimed to be far more thoroughgoing than any previous rectification campaign. At the very least, significant sections of the Party bureaucracy were clearly understood to constitute a new "bourgeois class." And yet, it was far from clear, according to Mao, whether this "class struggle" should aim for a social revolution to actually *overthrow* the Party officials, or, remaining more strictly "cultural" (i.e. *ideological*), should aim merely to "remold" the officials ideologically as in past campaigns. Despite these ambiguities, and despite Mao's imposed limitations, the students grabbed enthusiastically at these unprecedented freedoms, and from mid-August into the fall and winter of 1966 all across China, millions of Red Guards took to the streets. Authorities in schools and in local governments were dragged out, put on "trial," paraded through the streets in dunce caps with placards around their necks denouncing their "crimes." Many were physically assaulted and some, killed.<sup>49</sup>

But the bureaucracy was not so easily humbled. To the consternation of Mao's supporters, local party committees organized *their own* Red Guards thus pitting one student faction against another, each one more "red" than the next. As Red Guards battled one another into the Fall of 1966, the confusion was total, and the confrontations increasingly violent. The confusion was, of course, engendered by the very diffuseness of the movement—its lack of clear goals or program, having been given no purpose beyond criticizing the authorities. For months the Red Guards had no clear idea of exactly *who* where the "bourgeoisie" or even that there were two distinct "lines." It was not until mid-November that Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping were revealed by "the Center" as "the persons in authority taking the capitalist road."<sup>50</sup> This process was not accidental. It was the product of a carefully conceived movement, orchestrated from above, mobilizing at each stage no more forces than it was hoped would be necessary to achieve limited ends—to put enough pressure on the Central Committee to tilt the balance in favor of the Maoists.<sup>51</sup> In retrospect, the Maoists' apprehension was fully warranted: From the very start the movement tended to get out of hand and take on its own momentum, as the Red Guards went beyond the objectives laid down by the CRG and began to strike out *at the bureaucracy as a whole*. *Tatzupao* went up attacking Chou En-lai, Ch'en Po-ta. Chiang Ch'ing and even Mao himself. The CRG responded in kind with calls to order, denunciations of violence and curtailment of travel by September.<sup>52</sup>

## **Mao Turns to the Working Class**

Most frustrating to the Maoists, the Red Guards had little impact. By November the movement had been going strong for months and still the Maoists had yet to win many significant victories. The CRG had, without difficulty, won control of Peking party committees and municipal

government as well as the central press and cultural organs. But beyond these their Influence was much less extensive. Liu Shao-ch'i and Teng Hsiao-ping had made "self-criticisms" but managed to keep them from being published, And in Shanghai, the Australian Journalist, Neale Hunter, reported that not a single high Party official had been discredited.<sup>53</sup> In exasperation, Mao now took a tremendous gamble. He resolved to take the movement into the factories and mobilize the only force with the social power to really put the heat on the bureaucracy—the industrial proletariat. It was a step not lightly taken, and from the first, Mao and the CRG were extremely reluctant to unleash the working class. Instructions from the Center were cautious though ambiguous, and from start to finish Mao stressed the *limited* scope of the movement. In his words: "Workers should firmly stick to their production posts, firmly uphold the system of eight hours, and make revolution only in the spare time outside their working hours."<sup>54</sup> Ma Ta, editor of the *Liberation Daily*, warned the Maoists: "once the Cultural Revolution gets going in the factories, there'll be no end to it."<sup>55</sup> In fact, whether they wanted it or not, the movement had already begun to spread to the factories, as workers, influenced by the revolutionary rhetoric of the leadership and by leftist students, began pressing their grievances as well.<sup>56</sup>

The entry of the workers into the movement, however, presented far more formidable dangers to Mao and the CRG. The Maoists needed to deliver a massive jolt to the system to "shake up" the bureaucracy. This could only be administered by a real mass movement from below. Yet, far more than the directionless and powerless student movement, such a movement of workers posed a potential threat to the bureaucratic system as a whole. In particular, the call to the workers to "make revolution" was taken up as an invitation to press their own claims and aspirations in all fields, from wages and conditions within the factories to broader political questions of workers control. If the workers shared with Mao their hatred of an oppressive and exploitative bureaucracy, they did not share his interests in revolutionary austerity.

### **The "January Storm": The Workers Revolution Begins**

From mid-December of 1966 through January of the next year, China exploded in massive strikes and insurrections unparalleled since the revolution of 1925-27. Once again the great industrial and commercial city of Shanghai took the lead. Transport, water and electricity were paralyzed and factories shut down. Railway workers seized control of the rail system and struck for ten days. Dockworkers took over the harbor administration and closed the port for several days. Food and retail workers struck for 43 days. By late December, the strikes had spread throughout the industrial centers—to the famous Taching oil fields, the coal mines, the northeast steel plants, and even to factories in Peking itself. Shanghai was also in the lead politically. Whereas in other cities it had been Red Guard groups who first sparked the formation of rebel groups in factories, in Shanghai young workers and dissident lower ranking cadres organized independently of the Party and the Red Guards through the summer and autumn, and, in early November, brought together 20,000 workers from some 200 of the city's 800 factories to found the Shanghai Workers Central Headquarters—the first independent workers movement since liberation.<sup>57</sup> This was the nucleus of what would become the Shanghai Commune. Foremost among the workers' demands were calls for higher wages, shorter hours, safer working conditions, payment of wage arrears and overtime, and the restoration of free trade unions. But these demands could in no sense be construed as simply "economistic" or "self-interested." Instead, they were strikingly egalitarian. Workers demanded the abolition of managerial and cadre privileges, the reduction of pay differentials among workers, and the abolition of the notorious "contract" labor system.<sup>58</sup>



The Maoist leadership was quick to respond to the emergence of this movement, and on December 12th the CRG dispatched Chang Ch'un-ch'iao to bargain with the striking workers. Chang immediately placed himself in the lead of the movement by bringing his authority (and by implication, Mao's) to the side of the workers in their struggle against the "reactionary" Shanghai authorities, forcing the mayor, Ts'ao Ti-ch'iu and Ch'en P'ei-hsien, first secretary of the Municipal Party Committee to accede to a list of worker demands—in return for a pledge from the workers to stop the strikes.<sup>59</sup>

Two groups in particular stood in the vanguard of the struggle—the railwaymen and the "contract" laborers. The railway workers, massively overburdened and fatigued from months of hauling millions of Red Guards, struck on December 30<sup>th</sup>, tying up rail transport along the east coast and commandeered trains to Peking to press their demands for shorter hours, back pay and overtime pay. They staged demonstrations in Shanghai and Peking, and were hailed in the Maoist press for their "selfless" devotion to the revolution: "They worked day in and day out, ignoring fatigue and personal needs, and facing hard work and problems bravely. In the course of performing their glorious task, the transport workers benefited greatly."<sup>60</sup> But it seems that this was about the only way they would benefit—for it was widely rumored that in its concern to reduce material incentives and to narrow the "three differences" between town and country, the leadership was proposing a 12 percent across-the-board pay cut for rail workers—to bring their wages closer into line with those of rural workers.<sup>61</sup>

The other group whose grievances were especially pressing, and who played a leading role in the 1967 strikes were the "contract" workers. These were rural peasants recruited as seasonal or semi-permanent unskilled labor in the mines (where they regularly comprised from one-half to two-thirds of the labor force), transport and the docks, and factories, while displaced or retired regular workers were taken off the state's payrolls and "sent down" to the countryside. The "worker-peasant system," as it was termed, had originally been proposed by Mao in 1962, and implemented in the following years as another means of eliminating the urban-rural, mental-manual, worker-farmer "differences."<sup>62</sup> But in the context of China's underdeveloped economy this gap could only be narrowed by depressing workers' living standards toward the level of the peasantry, instead of raising the income levels of the peasants. Thus, the system's main effect was to provide a vast pool of cheap labor for the state, which enabled planners to cut consumption costs and channel more money into capital investment. As "temporary" labor, contract workers could not join trade unions, and so were ineligible for free medical care, unemployment and retirement pay, or other benefits. Moreover, their costs of reproduction, i.e. the costs of their families' subsistence, their schooling, etc., everything but their individual subsistence wage while directly employed—was borne by the rural commune and not the state. While individual workers were prohibited from bringing their families with them (and many were away on contracts of from three to seven years), they were required to bring "their essential food grain" with them thereby reducing the "nonproductive expenses of the enterprises . . ." The *People's Daily* reported that in the 1965-66 winter season, the nation's sugar refineries, "now fully under the new system, discharged more than 7,800 permanent workers." As a result, "the State has saved wages amounting 2.5 million yuan."<sup>63</sup>

The details of the system—enforced by the state and universally resented both by the superexploited "migrant" workers, and by the discharged or "retired" permanent workers—only gained public attention when Chiang Ch'ing and the CRG—looking for allies against their enemies in the bureaucracy—momentarily lent their support to the aggrieved workers' demands for the abolition of the system. Chiang Ch'ing declared that "the whole thing is capitalist," and,

blaming Liu Shao-ch'i for its institution, urged the workers to take immediate and radical steps to end the system, to "just wipe out all the offices of labor distribution in the country."<sup>64</sup>

Striking workers were soon joined by other groups. With the momentary relaxation of the party's grip, hundreds of new organizations sprang up all over China bringing long suppressed grievances to the Center: Youth "voluntarily" "sent down" to the countryside and frontier provinces before the Cultural Revolution (as many as 70,000 Shanghai students reportedly had been transferred to remote Sinkiang alone) resented their victimization by the mobilization program, and formed a national organization demanding the right to return to the cities. Ex-PLA soldiers, calling themselves by such names as the "Red Flag Army" poured into Peking brandishing grievances against the State Council and national government. Temporary and contract workers in the "All-China Red Workers Rebels' General Corps" demanded full-time employment at standard wages. The "Revolutionary Committee of the Revolt of the Shanghai Apprentices" demanded shorter training periods at depressed wages and more opportunities for full-time employment. Squatters invaded and occupied the apartments of former capitalists and public buildings demanding better housing, etc.<sup>65</sup> As one observer wrote: "Thousands of workers with grievances from a hundred parts of China were now finding that they shared the same wage inequalities, insecure employment, and lack of social and political rights."<sup>66</sup>

## The Shanghai Commune

But by January, the strike wave moved far beyond mere economic demands: All over China workers seized upon the slogans of Mao and the Cultural Revolution Group—and especially the example of the "Paris Commune" invoked by the CRG for the Cultural Revolution committees and congresses—as models for a new form of *government*. In a conscious drive for power, workers in factory after factory, threw out the bosses and setup their own democratically elected factory committees and sought to link these tip on a local and even national scale.<sup>67</sup> In the cities, party municipal committees were falling like nine-pins before the wave of popular power. The movement crested in late January when, inspired by the huge popular upsurge, dozens of workers and Red Guard organizations came together to set up the famous "Shanghai Commune." On February 5th the Commune was inaugurated with a declaration read out to a massed rally of more than a million workers. It said in part:

The former Shanghai Municipal Party Committee anti Municipal People's Council have been smashed! All power belongs to the Shanghai People's Commune!

The Shanghai People's Commune is a new organization form created afresh under the guidance of the thought of Mao Tse-tung. This follows the total smashing of the state organ of dictatorship which was usurped by counter-revolutionary revisionists. Its organizational principle is democratic centralism as taught by Chairman Mao. It practices the most extensive democracy over the proletariat... Its leading members [with the exception of its First Secretary, Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and its Second Secretary, Yao Wen-yuan, who were "personally appointed" by Chairman Mao himself] were elected by the revolutionary masses according to the principle of the Paris Commune after the victory was achieved in the general seizure of power from the bottom upward.<sup>68</sup>

## "All Power to the Commune"?

Here, *if we are to take Mao at his word*, is just what he wanted. After months of struggle the "bourgeoisie" were completely routed, the workers had "seized power" *in Mao's name and with*

*his closest associates at their head.* Inexplicably, however now that workers' power was an established *fact* Mao wavered and then reversed himself. It is here that we come back to Charles Bettelheim's influential interpretation of these events (presented in his essay "The Great Leap Backward"). Where CRG statements and documents were invariably given nationwide press coverage, Bettelheim notes: "The Shanghai Commune was not hailed in the central press, any more than was the formation of communes in other cities, such as Taiyuan. Without being officially repudiated, the commune was not, so to speak, 'recognized' by the central authority. Some twenty days afterwards, it ceased to exist, with the birth of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee, presided over by Chang Ch'un-ch'iao who had taken part in the work of the Shanghai Commune, in accordance with the suggestion of the central group and with the approval of all the founding organizations." "Thus," he concludes, "in Shanghai as in other cities, the commune form, though it had been mentioned in the sixteen-point declaration of August 1966, was dropped and replaced by that of the revolutionary committee . . . No real argument justifying this change has ever been set forth." (*GLB*, p. 102).

Now Bettelheim's essay is by far the most systematic and critical attempt from a Maoist political perspective, to reconcile Mao's avowed political *stance* (in support of popular power) with the apparently contradictory *actions* of Mao and the Mao group during the Cultural Revolution. And characteristically, Bettelheim's method is to present a highly abstract, and as we shall see, quite ahistorical account of the Shanghai Commune, which aims to absolve Mao from direct responsibility for the Commune's defeat. Thus, alluding to Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's televised speech on February 24th in which Chang relayed Mao's "directives" to supporters of the Commune, Bettelheim writes:

Mao did not question the principle of the commune, but he did question whether the correct procedure had been followed in forming it. He doubted, moreover, whether the model inspired by the Paris Commune could be adopted anywhere but in Shanghai, China's most advanced working-class center. He also wondered about the international problems that would result from the proclamation of communes all over China. These observations were not very convincing, and took the form of questions rather than arguments. In any case, they did not lead to a condemnation of the commune, but were only an appeal for caution and prudence. (*GLB*. p. 102)

But Bettelheim is not really telling us quite the whole story. For in fact Mao not only *explicitly rejected* the Commune as "*ultra-democratic*" but *insisted on its dissolution* and demanded the replacement of communes with "Three-in-One Revolutionary Committees." Had Bettelheim quoted Mao's statements directly this would be more than clear: On hearing that the Shanghai rebel organizations had called for the "elimination of all chiefs." Mao declared:

The slogan of "Doubt everything and overthrow everything" is reactionary. The Shanghai People's Committee demanded that the Premier of the State Council should do away with all heads. This is extreme anarchism, it is most reactionary . . . In reality there will still always be "heads." It is the content which matters.

But who was to decide the "content"? Who was to decide who should run society, the Party or the workers, the proletariat? Mao continued:

The people of Shanghai like the People's Commune very much, and like that name very

much. What shall we do? ...

If everything were changed to the Commune, then what about the party? Where would we place the party? Among commune committee members are both party members and non-party members. Where would we place the party committee? There must be a party somehow. There must be a hard core, no matter what we call it. Be it called a Communist Party, or a social-democratic party. But can the commune replace the party? His conclusion left no room for doubt:

I think that we had better change the name, and not call it a commune, we should still convene the National People's Congress, and the State Council. Let the Shanghai People's Commune be changed to Shanghai Municipal Revolutionary Committee (*Miscellany* pp, 451-455)

On February 27th, the Shanghai People's Commune passed into history and was replaced by the "Shanghai Municipal Revolutionary Committee" headed by Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and backed by the army. Bettelheim, not surprisingly, asks "how the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, who had supported the political form of the commune, went back, in practice, to their previous attitude, claiming that China was not "ready" for this political form" (*GLB*. p. 103). Indeed, this was precisely the question asked by the revolutionary left—the Red Guards and revolutionary workers, when Mao made his right-about-face. As Sheng-wu-lien (shortened form of Hunan Provincial Proletarian Revolutionary Great Alliance Committee), perhaps the most famous of what were soon to be denounced by Chiang Ch'ing, Chen Po-ta and the rest of the CRG as "ultra-left" and "Trotskyist" organizations, declared in its blistering manifesto, "Whither China":

As everybody knows, the greatest fact of the January Revolution was that 90% of the senior cadres were made to stand aside. What the editorial (Mao's May 7, 1966 Directive) had called for was truly realized, i.e., that "the masses should rise and take hold of the destiny of their socialist country and themselves administer the cities, industry, communications, and finance."

The January Revolution turned all this within a very short time from the hands of the bureaucrats into the hands of the enthusiastic working class. Society *suddenly* found, *in the absence of bureaucrats, that they could not only go on living, but could live better and develop quicker and with greater freedom*, it was not at all like the intimidation of the bureaucrats who, before the revolution, had said; "Without us, production would collapse, and the society would fall into a state of hopeless confusion."

As a matter of fact, without the bureaucrats and bureaucratic organs, productivity was greatly liberated. After the Ministry of the Coal Industry fell, production of coal went on as usual. The Ministry of Railways fell, but transportation was carried as usual... The management of industrial plants by the workers themselves after January was impressive. For the first time, the workers had the feeling that "it is not the state which manages us, but we who manage the state." For the first time they felt that they were producing for themselves. Their enthusiasm had never been so high, and their sense of responsibility as masters of the house had never been so strong.

*Why, then, did Chairman Mao, who strongly advocated the "commune" suddenly oppose the establishment of the "Shanghai People's Commune" in January? This is something which the revolutionary people find hard to understand.* Chairman Mao, who foresaw the

"commune" as the political structure which must be realized by the Cultural Revolution, suddenly proposed: "Revolutionary Committees are fine." (emphasis added).

The manifesto went on to locate the source of the weakness of the "ultra-left" and the workers' movement as follows:

This is the first time the revolutionary people tried to overthrow their powerful enemy. How shallow their knowledge of this revolution was! Not only did they fail to consciously understand the necessity to completely smash the old state machinery and to overhaul some of the social systems, they also did not even recognize that their enemy formed a class. The revolutionary ranks were dominated by ideas of "revolution to dismiss officials," and "revolution to drag out people . . ." Proposing the three-in-one combination is tantamount to helping the reinstatement of the bureaucrats already toppled in the January Revolutions."<sup>69</sup> (emphasis added)

### **Mao, Bettelheim and the Question off Popular Power**

Bettelheim's account of the counterrevolution which followed the collapse of the Shanghai Commune is based centrally around the effort to efface Mao's complicity in the events by the claim that Mao and the CRG were only a *minority* in the Party, and thus were overwhelmed by the conservative forces:

The supporters of the revolutionary line did not manage to strengthen their position in the party sufficiently to prevent comebacks by increasing numbers of Rightist and revisionist elements. Finally the *coup d'etat* of October 1976 . . . was the culmination... of a process which had been going on for years. (GLB. p. 104)

That Mao's faction in the party was a minority is indisputable. But this cannot be the explanation. For to begin with, we have Mao's own word for it that he himself opposed the Commune. What's more, he opposed not merely its "procedure" but as we have already seen, the very *principle* of mass democratic rule from below—the direct election and recall of leadership. As he told a visiting Albanian delegation in August 1967:

Some people say that election is very good and very democratic. I think election is only a civilized term. I myself do not admit that there is any true election. I was elected People's Deputy for Peking District, but how many people are there in Peking who really understand me? I think the the election of Chou En-lai as Premier means his appointment by the Center.<sup>70</sup>

Secondly, in rather sharp contrast to the disunity and political unclarity of the mass movement, what was most apparent about the events from February' forward was precisely the *unity of the party*—both "left" and "right" over *against the militant workers and the "ultra-left."* To take an obvious example, it was not the "rightist" Shanghai Municipal Party Commute (whose leaders, Ts'ao Ti-ch'un and Ch'en P'ci-hsien were in any case under arrest), but the "leftist" Chang Ch'un-ch'iao who brought down repression on the workers and students movements in January and February 1967. Barely weeks before, Chang and the rest of the CRG had urged on the masses to "make revolution to the end!", to "seize power" from the "bourgeois " bureaucracy. Now in January and February, he brought in the PLA and his own Public Security forces to: break up meetings of the "Red Revolutionaries," Shanghai's largest student organization (on January 27th), to raid the headquarters and arrest the leaders of the "Red Flag Army" (reported February 19th), to suppress an organization of "sent-down" permanent Shanghai workers (reported February 24th), and to take over the docks, railway stations, water works, power plants, radio

stations, post office and banks and other key installations—often against the resistance of workers who had already seized these facilities.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, where in the months up till January, the “leftist” Chang and others in the CRG had proclaimed that “only the masses can liberate themselves,” now in his speech of February 24th. Chang told Shanghai’s workers that while they “may be adept in the management of one workshop,” they “lacked the experience” to run a complex industrial metropolis such as Shanghai. Shanghai he flatly stated, could not be run by its workers and students alone. For this they would need to rely on two “allies”: the Peoples’ Liberation Army, especially its higher ranking officers, and the Party cadres, especially the senior veterans—“the great majority of whom are good or comparatively good.”<sup>72</sup>

In this, as in so many other instances, explanations of Chinese politics on the basis of party divisions between “reactionary rightists” and “revolutionary leftists” won’t stand up to the historical evidence. Bettelheim, as a sympathetic yet critical Maoist, is reluctant to fully accept such explanations arguing that the problem is more deeply rooted in the *entire* party’s fundamentally “contradictory relations with the working masses.” (*GLB*, pp. 104-105). And here, he goes right to the point—which from our perspective is the very heart of the matter. The question for revolutionaries, he says, should be:

Is power in the hands of the masses, of their organizations and advanced elements, or is it in the party's hands? Or, putting it another way, is power wielded *by* the working people or is it wielded *for* them (assuming that the ruling party can remain in the service of the working people without being placed under effective control by them)? (emphasis in original) (*GLB*. p- 105)

In striking departure from his previous “partyist” perspective (cf. *OTTS\** pp. 61-65; or *CS\** 1, p. 109), Bettelheim now looks to the working class as the instrument of socialist revolution, and holds up the commune-state as the model of a workers government:

For Marx, in *The Civil War* in France, the commune is the organ of power, the political form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Similarly, for Lenin, in *State and Revolution*, the soviets are the organs of power of the working people. In those two works the leading role of a revolutionary party is not even mentioned. In 1919 Lenin noted, as a negative fact, that the soviets were not, as they should have been, “organs of government for the working people by the advanced section of the proletariat, but not by the working people as a whole.” This situation was not destined to change, and led to the complete loss of power by the Soviet working people. (*GLB*. p. 105)

In saying this, Bettelheim is not so much rejecting the need for a revolutionary party, as he is rejecting a certain *form*—the Stalinist bureaucratic party. In its place, Bettelheim is *beginning* to point to the need for a revolutionary party comprised of direct producers, leading (and learning from) the workers’ movement, a party that earns the right to represent them by winning their support *politically*, that is subject to the *democratic will* of the working class in their own *institutions of self-rule*, classically the soviets or workers’ councils. Consistent with this conception, Bettelheim does not fail to censure the Chinese Party leadership, the Maoist “lefts,” for their failure to support the Commune they themselves had inspired: “The substitution of revolutionary committees for the commune form in Shanghai, the role accorded to the PLA in choosing representatives of the masses, and the way in which these representatives were appointed to the revolutionary committees, all implied abandonment of the orientation which

had been explicitly adopted in August 1966." (*GLB*, pp. 105-106).

### The "February Adverse Current": Mao Leads the Reaction

Yet it is just here that Bettelheim's consistency breaks down. For it is the central thrust of his argument that the "revolutionary line" was defeated by the *seemingly inexorable resurgence* of the "rightists" and "conservatives." In Bettelheim's account, these forces "narrowed the front of the attack" to sacrifice a few individuals—Liu Shao-ch'i, Teng Hsiao-ping and others—in order to save the rest of the bureaucracy, brought in the PLA to enforce the transfer of power from the communes to the "Three-In-One Committees," and demobilized the mass movements (*GLB*, pp. 103-164). But what, we must ask, gave the conservatives such resilient strength? According to Bettelheim, Mao and "the most consistent promoters of the revolutionary line" were isolated because of the "slight relative weight of the *Chinese proletariat*" (*GLB*, pp. 125-126; emphasis in original). Consequently, they were forced *against their will* to make compromising alliances, to rely on other forces such as Lin Piao and the army (*GLB*, p. 125).

Now for readers of Bettelheim's essay, this must come as a very curious statement indeed—since it was precisely the whole point of his original argument to demonstrate, despite their numerical weakness, the massive social power and *strength* of the Chinese proletariat. *Under their own power* the workers proved themselves able to throw out the bosses and set up factory committees to run industry, to overthrow the Party-state authorities in Shanghai and other cities and supplant these structures with democratic self-governing communes. As Bettelheim himself has shown, for a brief few weeks power lay "in the streets"—in the spontaneous self-organized democratic institutions of the working masses. All the forces Mao needed lay right to hand. Yet, what happened?

Instead of aligning himself with the workers against the bureaucracy, Mao called in the *army* at the end of January 1967 "to support the left"—not against the right but *against the workers and Red Guards* in the factories and schools.<sup>73</sup> The cultural revolution threatened to become a social revolution. And contrary to Bettelheim, it was the Great Helmsman himself who led the reaction—and never troubled to deny it: "Who is the black hand? The black hand is still not captured. The black hand is nobody else but me... I am the black hand that suppressed the Red Guards" Mao told a startled Red Guard audience in July 1968 (*Miscellany* pp. 469-70, 480). It was, after all, Mao who dispatched Chang Ch'un-ch'iao to demobilize the Commune. It was also Mao who called for the "restoration" of disgraced cadres—explicitly rejecting the elective principle and the concept of "rule from below." It was Mao and CRG who, on January 13th, 1967 rejected pay raises for contract and temporary workers "because of circumstances in China," and who from February 17th *outlawed* as "counter-revolutionary" *all* the spontaneous organizations of "worker-peasants," unemployed and "sent-down" youth, apprentices, ex-army men, etc. that had emerged in the height of the struggle.<sup>74</sup> It was Mao again, who embraced army chief of staff Lin Piao as his "closest comrade in arms," designated him his "heir apparent" and gave him and the army free rein to impose by force the "power seizures" by "Three-in-One Committees" against popularly controlled mass organizations throughout China's twenty-eight provinces. This bloody struggle plunged the country into near civil war for two years and cost, the regime now admits, many tens of thousands of lives.<sup>75</sup> And finally, it was Mao who, in fear of the mounting danger of the Soviets and the failure of the Cultural Revolution to generate a breakthrough in economic development, initiated the right turn in foreign policy extending the invitation to Richard Nixon in 1972.

## CONCLUSION

### "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?"

Where did Bettelheim and Sweezy go wrong? Mao mobilized the workers to "make revolution," but the Cultural Revolution put his ideas to the test. China's workers moved into struggle over material gains, but almost immediately posed the question of power—challenging Party rule and creating new institutions of self-rule in its place. And they showed that if the workers took power, they would do so in their own interests, to better their conditions instead of accepting permanent austerity; to take control over their lives and win the greatest possible freedom, instead of handing over power to a new dictatorship of "radicals." But this struggle for *self-emancipation*, for "socialism from below" collided head on not only with the right wing of the bureaucracy but with the Maoist "lefts"—for whom the masses were at best the object, not the subject, of history, the "blank sheet" to be "written upon," "mobilized" and emancipated "from above" by an omniscient revolutionary elite. So, when it came down to the workers or the bureaucracy, Mao went with the bureaucracy. Mao's cynical about face should hardly have surprised western Maoists. Rather, that outcome was predictable and flowed with rigorous logic from the first premises of Mao's theory of the substitutionist party. Having rejected the working class as the agent of socialist revolution, on whom else could he rely?<sup>76</sup> Despite all his talk about "relying on the masses", Mao did not trust the masses, particularly the workers, to build socialism or to run society themselves. For Mao, the Party, and the Party alone, was the repository of socialist ideas, the guarantor of socialist direction to the revolution and the economy. The "masses," the workers and peasants, spontaneously generated "bourgeois" and "economist" ideas and tendencies. So, no matter how corrupt or bureaucratic the Party had become, Mao saw no choice but to side with the bureaucracy against the movements for popular power. But in so doing he doomed his own conception of an anti-bureaucratic socialism by *preparing* the victory of the bureaucratic right. Thus the victory' and final consolidation of Teng Hsiao-ping and the most conservative forces in the Party was virtually a foregone conclusion. After Mao undermined the mass movements and thereby cut himself off from the potential of mass opposition to the bureaucracy, was it any wonder that the bureaucracy would strengthen itself?

Those who, like Bettelheim and Sweezy, see the revolutionary and antibureaucratic side of Mao (which was genuine), but do not see that Mao was *at the same time* the original architect and main bulwark of the bureaucratic totalitarian state, fail to grasp the inherently contradictory and utopian character of Maoism, and therefore miss an essential dynamic of the Chinese revolution.

### **The Cadre-Bureaucracy; A Substitute Proletariat or a Substitute Bourgeoisie?**

There is no question that in trying to make a socialist revolution in China, Mao faced enormous problems—in particular, China's underdevelopment and the absence of revolution in the advanced countries. But as we've tried to show here, these objective difficulties were



immeasurably compounded by Mao's strategy of revolution. Instead of looking to the working class, building the broadest possible democracy, and self-industrializing as a "holding operation" while looking for openings internationally to spread the revolution (the "permanent revolution" strategy of Bolsheviks), Mao made self-industrialization through accumulation (surplus extraction) and reliance on the substitutionist party his mainstays. These virtually insured degeneration, whatever the objective possibilities.

Mao's ideas and revolutionary strategy were crucially shaped, as we've tried to indicate, by the failure of China's proletarian revolution in the late 1920's, by Stalin's efforts to subordinate the Chinese revolution to Russian state interests, and especially by Mao's substitutionist political practice of the thirties and forties. Out of these experiences, Mao justified the *substitutionist* vanguard party by the backwardness of China's peasant masses. This had a certain rationale in the context of the peasant milieu of the revolutionary years (whether the party's abandonment of the industrial working class in the interim was in any sense "justified" is another matter). But this substitutionist practice was, as we saw, definitely *not* justified in the context of the self-active workers movements of the post-revolutionary period, especially the 1960's. That the party leadership did not look to the working class, even at the height of the Cultural Revolution, reflected the fact that in its long substitutionist experience, the cadre party had developed *its own* distinct material and social interests which were not the same as the workers, and not socialist. Mao's idea had been that through continuous ideological struggle, the party could remain a "classless" purely political force acting in the interest of the working class. But as we saw, the party's conception of "socialist revolution" directly reflected its own social composition and objective position in society. This was a party recruited from the middle classes and petty bourgeoisie, organized above society as an autonomous party-military-bureaucracy, and in control of production as collective "owners" of the state and the social surplus, not as direct producers. Therefore, while *subjectively* socialist, the Party's vision and strategy of socialism was revolutionary but substitutionist and nationalist, collectivist but anti-democratic and bureaucratic, based on mass mobilization but under authoritarian control. Such a program could and did lead to economic development within limits, but it could never lead to a socialist society.

Thus, without a revolutionary internationalist strategy designed to get help for industrialization from workers in the advanced countries (by helping them to overthrow their own ruling classes), Mao had no alternative but to try to self-industrialize. But as we saw, that could only be done, within a national framework, by reverting to exploitative methods of surplus extraction: holding down wages, squeezing the peasants. However much Mao may have wished otherwise, a nationalist strategy' meant imposing an exploitative and repressive dynamic of "primitive accumulation" similar to that which the capitalists had imposed in the west and Stalin in Russia. While it may be argued that world revolution was not on the agenda in the post-war period, nonetheless there were significant openings—in Hungary, Indonesia, Vietnam, Chile, France, Portugal and elsewhere, especially in the Sixties. But Mao chose not to take advantage of these openings, and in some cases actually supported their repression (Hungary, Ceylon, etc.). It was not a question of the need to compromise or the lack of resources. Compromise was necessary to survive, but this did not require his open political and military support to reactionary regimes. Mao's foreign policy was no aberration, as some like to think. It was organically linked to his domestic policy. If Mao did not help China's own workers to take power, should we be surprised that he did not support the struggles of workers in Chile, etc.? Why should he? Mao conceived of "socialist construction" not through the transfer of resources from the advanced to the backward countries, but through internal accumulation paid for by China's workers and

peasants. So he saw no compelling *need* to support international revolution because he did not look to an international workers' government to gain access to technology and resources in the world economy. Conversely, since the survival of the party bureaucracy depended on a state-based military industrial structure that could only be endangered by an internationalist policy, there were very good reasons for Mao not to support revolutions or, à la Stalin, to subordinate them to state interests.

Likewise, without relying on China's working class, Mao could not prevent the bureaucratization of the revolutionary party or the alienation of the masses. A strategy of self-industrialization meant the need to impose huge sacrifices on direct producers, so he couldn't rely on popular control since they would naturally resist this as a long-term policy. But without popular control workers and peasants were alienated and Mao couldn't get them to voluntarily contribute their initiative, their creativity and energy to improve productivity within the means available, and, so had to force them to do so. Without democratic control of production, the party leadership could not get accurate information from below- on factory and commune resources, capacities and productive potentials. So they couldn't rationally plan or maximise potentials actually available, but had to rely on top-down bureaucratic planning with its inevitable miscalculations and blunders like the Great Leap Forward. Finally, without institutions of popular democracy to supervise and control officials through elections, right of recall, etc. there was no way to enforce the responsiveness and accountability of cadres and managers. Mao's efforts to check the bureaucratization through ideological struggle and mass "criticism" proved less and less effective against the increasing real power of the bureaucracy. Thus the bureaucracy steadily evolved into a new ruling class, and Mao into an "anti-bureaucratic" bureaucrat. Mao's own political degeneration simply followed the same downward spiral of his party: from rejection of the working class to reliance on the party cadre: from corruption of the party, to reliance on an ever narrower circle within the party and finally, to his own pathetic self-deification in the cult of the Thought of Mao Tse-tung.

Sweezy was quite correct to highlight the substitutionist role of the party in China's revolution. But in its historic aims and aspirations—national development and bureaucratic rule—the cadre party substituted not for the proletariat but for China's national bourgeoisie. In the heyday of the third worldism of the new left, Sweezy, Bettelheim and many others argued that the industrial working classes in both advanced and underdeveloped had been bought off and integrated. The very idea of international, working-class led revolutions appeared to them as "utopian." Instead they looked to substitutionist parties to build autarkic socialisms in the third world. There is no underestimating the difficulties of building working class revolutionary movements in the industrialized countries, or of linking these systematically to the struggles of revolutionaries in the underdeveloped world. Nonetheless, this remains the only real alternative to the certain utopianism of substitutionism and a strategy of Socialism in One Country. If there is a lesson to be drawn from the Chinese revolution, it is that there is no substitute for the working class and there is no third way for the third world.

**notes:**

48. See Jean Esmein, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*. New York 1963. pp. 93-134: and Neale Hunter. *Shanghai Journal*, Boston. 1969, pp. 65-66,68-71. For the text of the "Sixteen Points" decision see *CCP Documents of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution 1966-1967*, Union Research Institute; Hong Kong 1967, pp. 42-54.

49. For an unforgettable portrait of the impact of the Cultural Revolution and the Red Guard movement upon the lives of ordinary Chinese, see Chen Jo-hsi, *The Execution of Mayor Yin and Other Stories from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, London, 1978. See also Simon Ley's *Iconoclastic Chinese Shadows*, London 1976.
50. Gordon A. Rennet and Ronald N. Montaperto. *Red Guard*. New York 1972, pp. 136-141 and passim: Hunter, pp. 154, 176, 180, 195.
51. Esmein. p. 93.
52. Livio Maitan, *Party, Army and Masses in China*. London 1976, pp. 109-110.
53. Hunter, pp. 111, 134,
54. *NCNA*, Feb. 10. 1968: *SCMP* 4119. Also see "Ten Regulations of the CCP Central Committee Concerning Grasping Revolution and Promoting Production," Dec. 9. 1966, in *CCP Documents*, pp. 133-135. See similar statements and reservations by other members of the CRG in Hunter, pp. 111-112. 131, 133. 139 140. 144: and Esmein, p. 200.
55. Hunter, p. 144.
56. Hunter, pp. 131. 133-34H.
57. Victor Nee and James Peek, editors, *China's Uninterrupted Revolution*, New York 1973, pp. 327-328: and Andrew G. Waider, *Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and Shanghai's January Revolution*. Ann Arbor; Center for Chinese Studies, 1978, p. 28.
58. Maitan. p. 125: Esmein, pp. 197-98. 199: Nee and Peek, pp. 337-338: and David Milton and Nancy Dali Milton. *The Wind Will Not Subside*. New York. pp. 186-189.
59. Walder, pp. 28-30.
60. *NCNA*. January 16, 1967
61. See "Trouble on the Tracks", *Current Scene*, May 19, 1967: and Colina MacDougall. "Revolution on China's Railroads," *Current Scene*, Aug. 16, 1968.
62. See "Sources of Labor Discontent in China: the Worker-Peasant System," *Current Scene*, Mar. 15, 1968, pp. 1-28: and Colina MacDougall. "Second Class Workers," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (hereafter FEER), May 9, 1968, pp. 306-308. On the origins of the system in the context of post-Great Leap Forward restructuring, see Lynn T. White III. "Workers' Politics in Shanghai," *Journal of Asian Studies* (Nov. 1976), 99, 99-116.
63. *Current Scene*, Mar. 15, 1968, pp. 4-6.
64. "Minutes of Talks with Leading Comrades of the Cultural Revolution Group at Interview Granted Representatives of the All-China Red Workers Rebels' General Corps" (Dec. 26, 1966), quoted in Milton and Milton, *The Wind Will Not Subside*, p. 188.
65. Milton and Milton, pp. 199-200: Hong Yung Lee. *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, Berkeley 1978, pp. 129-34 ff.; K.S. Karol. *The Second Chinese Revolution*, New York 1973, pp. 214-15: Walder, pp. 39-48.
66. Milton and Milton, p. 186.
67. Esmein, pp. 176-177; and Maitan. p. 125.
68. Shanghai *Wen-hui Pao*. February 6, 1967, excerpted and translated in *The Great Power Struggle in China*. Asia Research Centre: Hong Kong 1969, pp. 89-90. The summary here of developments leading up to the formation of the Commune has necessarily been brief and rather simplified. In fact, its political development was extremely complex. The forces comprising the workers movement, like the student movement, were highly factionalized and politically confused. Among the most significant tendencies, we should point to the emergence of major opposition within the Commune movement to Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's "usurpation" of the leadership of the Workers Headquarters and the Commune. Opposition apparently centered around Chang's efforts since early January to sidetrack workers' economic demands, to demobilize strikes and get workers back to work, and most ominously, his use of PLA forces to take over strategic administrative and economic units, airports, communications centers, banks, etc. In reaction, more than half of the "Workers Headquarters" coalition that ultimately founded the Shanghai Commune, including many of the most militant and independent workers groups, broke away in late January to form their own "Shanghai Revolutionary Committee of Broad Unity" under the leadership of two dissident party cadres. Keng Chin-chang and Ch'en Hung-kang. For a time it appeared as if this current might found its own more popularly based "New Shanghai People's Commune." But these hopes proved futile and this

tendency dissolved, along with the original Commune, in February. "Factionalism" of course, is no explanation for their demise. Rather that factionalism itself derived from the lack of clear *political* alternatives to Maoism. However militant and however much their real Interests conflicted with Maoism, virtually no student or worker groups proved able as yet to break with Mao and pose a coherent political alternative. As a result, all were demoralized and fell apart when the Maoists and then Mao himself moved to the right and abandoned the Commune and the slogan of popular power. By far the best account of the politics of the Commune is to be found in Neale Hunter's chronicle. *Shanghai Journal*, pp. 244-267, but see also the descriptions by Victor Nee, "Revolution and Bureaucracy; Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution" in Victor Nee and James Peck, editors, *China's Uninterrupted Revolution*, pp. 322-414; and Jean Esmein, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, chaps. 6&7. I am also very much indebted here to Andrew G. Walder for his painstaking reconstruction of the twists and turns of Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's politics in relation to the workers movement. See his *Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and Shanghai's January Revolution*.

69. "Whither China"; *SCMP* 4190. The text has been reprinted in full in *The Revolution is Dead. Long Live the Revolution*, edited by The 70's. Hong Kong May 1976, pp. 180-200: and in abbreviated form in *International Socialism* (London, Jun.-Jul. 1969) pp. 23-28.

70. "Mao Tse-tung Talks with Albanian Visitors," *People's China*, p. 265, cited in Milton, pp. 198-99.

71. Walder, *Chang Ch'un-ch'iao*, pp. 52, 58-63, 65.

72. *SCMP* 4147; Hunter, *Shanghai Journal*, pp. 261-262; and Alexandra Close, "Mao Plays His Last Trump," *FEER* (Mar.16. 1967), pp. 495-499.

73. Esmein, pp. 178-179; and Jurgen Domes. "The Cultural Revolution and the Army," *Asian Survey* (May 1968), pp. 354 IT.

74. Milton and Milton, p. 200: *Current Scene*, March 15. 1965, pp. 10-12. 16-20. Another eyewitness, the journalist Jean Esmein, who was a strong supporter of Mao, nonetheless presents a thorough description of the systematically conflicting interests between the Maoists and the workers and students at every point along the line. See Esmein, pp. 93, 111, 144-46, 152-54, 162-63, 182 and 198-99.

75. On the military repression of popular organizations, see inter alia, Jurgen Domes, *China After The Cultural Revolution*, Berkeley 1977, pp. 9-22: Karol, chaps. 4&5: and Simon Leys, *The Chairman's New Clothes*, New York 1977, chap. 2.

76. Here we should *also* point out that however much Mao attacked the *symbols* of elitism—by abolishing rank insignia in the army, by forcing the Party cadres to "rough it" tilling the soil a few weeks a year in "May Seventh Cadre Schools," still he never mounted a sustained attack against the substance of bureaucratic privilege; their high salaries, preferred housing, and other perquisites of office. Again, how could he? Given the cadres alienation from society, how could he motivate them to mobilize the masses, and to take the flack for it from below and from above—unless there was something in it for them? Nor was this hypocrisy confined just to the cadres. While prescribing a diet of unrelieved economic and cultural austerity for the masses, rice and revolutionary operas were by no means the staple of the Maoist ruling elite behind the walls of the Forbidden City—as a perusal of Roxane Witke's authorized biography, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* makes abundantly clear. On this topic, see besides Witke, David Morawetz, "Walking on Two Legs? Reflections on a China Visit," *World Development*(Aug.-Sept. 1979), pp. 877-891; Richard Curt Kraus. "The Limits of Maoist Egalitarianism," *Asian Survey* (Nov. 1976),pp. 1081-1096; and of course, Simon Leys, *Chinese Shadow's*, and idem. *Broken Images*, London 1979.