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Mao Tse-tung's Revolution Continues?

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From about the first of February some symptoms have pointed to a possible resurgence of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of 1966-1968. There was a reappearance of the wall posters, often vague criticism of "persons in authority," specific criticism of the late Lin Piao and of Confucius. These signs, coupled with the obviously approaching problem of succession, made it appear that a new upheaval in China was imminent.

The criticism of Lin Piao as a traitor was tied in with his alleged adherence to Confucian ideas. Confucius was attacked on ideological grounds. He was accused of promulgating "feudal" ideas of class structure. His "doctrine of the mean" came in for special attack. The Legalist school was also attacked for its "feudal" emphasis; but Confucianism was the chief target, pictured as the very denial of revolutionary activity.

Revolution has so dominated our thinking about China in this century that we find it difficult to separate the two. Scholars have identified the Chinese Revolution as lasting for fifty or a hundred years, while Mao Tse-tung himself looked upon the maintenance of perpetual revolutionary favor as necessary to the achievement of the regeneration of China. Mao was especially concerned with the continuation of the revolution after the old leadership passed on. He also had the problem of opposition in the Party to his policies and of a lack of discipline.

"All this is extremely harmful to the interests of the revolution. Party committees at every level must discuss this matter again and again and work earnestly to overcome such indiscipline and anarchy so that all the powers that can and must be centralized will be concentrated in the hands of the central committee and its agencies." 4

The revolution then, in the view of Mao in 1966, had not ended, but it was necessary both to intensify "redness" and to reestablish a unity

1 Peking Review, February 1, 1974 through August 30, 1974 are examples.

of revolutionary goals for China. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was the result. The Red Guards not only became imbued with Mao’s revolutionary fervor, but also carried the message to their elders. Mao’s opponents were purged from their positions of responsibility in the Party and in the government. To stamp out reactionary elements required positive action. “Everything reactionary is the same; if you don’t hit it, it won’t fall. This is also like sweeping the floor; as a rule, where the broom does not reach, the dust will not vanish of itself.” \(^5\) Mao gave the objectives of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as “consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat, preventing capitalist restoration and building socialism.” \(^6\)

Success in the removal of reactionary elements and in the revival of revolutionary spirit brought an end to the Cultural Revolution in 1968. There was to be no end to the need for revolutionary spirit, however. In his report to the Ninth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1969, Lin Piao said “all revolutionary comrades must be clearly aware that class struggle will by no means cease in the ideological and political spheres. The struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie by no means dies out with our seizure of power.” \(^7\)

Lin Piao was identified in the new constitution of the Chinese Communist Party as Mao Tse-tung’s “close comrade-in-arms and successor.” \(^8\) His leadership of the Peoples’ Liberation Army was dedicated to the continuation of the revolution. Ironically, Lin in his turn was to become the focus of vituperation in the big character posters of 1974.

In 1969, in the proposed Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party, the socialist society was characterized as an historical phase of considerable duration. It was pointed out that

“In this historical phase, classes, class contradictions and class struggle will exist throughout, as will the struggle between the two roads of socialism and capitalism, the danger of capitalist restoration, and the threat of subversion and aggression by imperialism and modern revisionism. These contradictions can be resolved only by relying on the Marxist theory and practice of uninterrupted revolution.” \(^9\)

It seems clear that the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party did not view the end of the struggle with the forces of Chiang Kai-shek

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\(^5\) Mao Tse-tung \textit{Selected Works} (hereafter S.W.); Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1961, V. IV 1 p. 19.


\(^8\) \textit{Ibid.}, January 8, 1969, p. 6.

\(^9\) \textit{Ibid.}
in 1949 nor the end of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1968 as the end of the revolution in China. Revolution was to remain a continuous process under the guidance of the party until the reaching of the ultimate objective, “the realization of Communism.”

Mao’s conception of what constitutes revolution may be somehow different from our own. As Professor Wu Tien-wei has so cogently pointed out, Mao Tse-tung has come under little direct Western influence. “Save for Marxism-Leninism, Mao’s utopianism and nationalism are of Chinese origin.” Mao’s romantic revolutionary spirit was no doubt influenced by such traditional Chinese stories as contained in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms. But does Mao’s espousal of perpetual revolution imply that open struggle will occur again and again? Will we see repetitious of the Great Cultural Proletarian Revolution or will struggle be a matter accomplished within a framework of orderly activity directed toward the Party’s ultimate goal? As a matter of practice, the revolution looks to be little different than measures taken by any government struggling to bring “modernization.” Indeed, Mao’s revolutionary genius lies largely in his pragmatic exploitation of the opportunity offered by the delays in achieving “modernization” in China. As Stuart Schram points out, “these events [the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution] are a logical culmination of Mao’s life. A central theme . . . has been Mao’s participation, over half a century, in the effort of the Chinese to modernize and develop their country, and at the same time to remain themselves.”

The struggle, under communist leadership, for “modernization” in China has resulted in modest rates of economic growth over the past 15 years—perhaps 7 or 8 percent a year. There have been extensive changes in social structure and social institutions, some achieved by ruthless methods. There has been mass equalization of income and of perogative. These changes could be considered revolutionary in nature; changes such as the Great Leap Forward and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution would meet our popular conceptions of “revolution.”

10 Ibid.
Revolution is not so evident in much that has happened and is happening since the Cultural Revolution. In spite of Mao's opposition to "the theory of 'many centers,' that is the theory of 'no center,' mountain stronghold mentality, sectarianism and all other reactionary bourgeois trends which undermine working class leadership," there has been a move toward decentralization in many areas of Chinese affairs. Greater responsibilities in finance, farming, small industry, education and social services have been given to regional and local institutions—provincial governments and communes. If this trend were to continue, it would be in the Chinese tradition of regionalism and localism—hardly revolutionary. There is a school of thought which asserts that China since the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has been run by regional military commanders.15

That decentralization will probably continue is a result of development. As the economy becomes more pluralistic and decentralized, close central control becomes more difficult. There seems to be a continuing tendency for both the peasant and the urban dweller to "go into business for himself." At the grassroots, Mao has not succeeded in creating the "new communist man." Among both governmental and party bureaucracies, the growth of elitism (which was one target of the Cultural Revolution) is a constant danger. The recent reshuffling of military leaders among the provinces seems to have been an effort to prevent the establishment of too-strong power bases.

This trend toward regionalism or decentralization should not be over-stressed, however. The doctrines and methods of party discipline (i.e. the cheng-feng movement) and the Stalinist model of industrialization have resulted in a notable conformity, at least on the surface, among the people and an effective central control of key parts of the economy.

An objective of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was the increase in industrial and agricultural production through intensification of "redness." The term "Cultural Revolution" was no new one. In a speech by Lin Feng in June, 1960,16 the term was used in connection with promotion of the "walking with two legs" slogan. As used by Lin, the term "Cultural Revolution" involved the use of educational work to meet the needs of economic construction—to the stepping up of production.

The idea of reform of education in order to increase production was carried forward into the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The

intensity of the struggle through which education passed and the outcome are well recounted by William Hinton and Peter Seybolt.

An essential element in the question of education is "for whom" are the opportunities to be made available. Mao felt that the person best qualified to combine theory and practice was the person who had worked before acquiring theory. The worker, peasant and soldier would be most important. Of these, the poor peasant had first place in Mao's thoughts. "Without the poor peasant class . . ., it would have been impossible to bring about the . . . revolutionary condition in the countryside, or to overthrow the local tyrants and evil gentry and complete the democratic revolution." The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution resulted in priority in educational opportunity being given to poor peasants, workers, and soldiers. Origin, not intelligence or mastery of books, became the important qualification.

Bureaucrats underwent a process of "going down" to work among peasants or industrial workers. An intimacy with the masses and their problems became a necessary ingredient for qualification as a party or governmental bureaucrat. Richard Pfeffer, in an article in the book, China's Developmental Experience, gives an excellent summary of bureaucratic changes since the Cultural Revolution. Rehabilitation of bureaucrats (party and governmental) purged during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was widespread. The highest ranking purged official who has returned to public life is Teng Hsiano-ping, pre-Cultural Revolution Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. He returned to public life in the Fall of 1973, and in 1974 he, as Vice Premier, headed the Chinese delegation to the Sixth Special Session of the United Nations. Teng has substituted for the ailing Premier Chou En-lai on a number of public occasions recently.

Rectification of the thinking of bureaucrats and changes in the educational system are being continued along lines established during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution without a continuation of revolutionary activity. The cultivation of revolutionary fervor as a goad to production is another matter. Mao Tse-tung has said that "Revolution means liberating the productive forces and promoting their growth." By implication, Mao seems to tell us that only by keeping the revolu-

19 Mao Tse-tung, S.W. V.I., p. 83.
21 Peking Review, April 12, 1974.
tionary spirit burning among workers can productivity increase. In the absence of significant material incentives, the worker must be induced to greater efforts through the use of indoctrination. Fear of an external threat (i.e. an attack by Russia) can help, but most workers will need an activity on which they can focus in order to be stimulated to selfless efforts. The criticism of Lin Piao and Confucius, and the posting of the wall posters produced by criticism groups, seems designed to fill this need.

Great claims of increased production are made for the spirit engendered by criticism of Lin Piao and Confucius. This, then, would seem to be the reason for the activity noted over the spring and summer. No whipping up of revolutionary fervor through Red Guard activity; rather, the cooperative intellectual effort of studying selected portions of the works of Confucius, making much of Lin Piao's expressed admiration for Confucius, and of the treason committed by Lin Piao, these things are the focus of activity.

A report in the *Peking Review* of the results of such study by groups of industrial workers informs us:

“In summing up their experience in grasping revolution and promoting production since the beginning of this year, workers in Peking, Shanghai and Tientsin deeply realize that criticism of Lin Piao and Confucius is a powerful motive force for developing the social productive forces. They pledge to continue the criticism of Lin Piao and Confucius and regard it as a matter of primary importance so as to win still greater victories in revolution and production.”  

It seems reasonable to view the criticism of Confucius and Lin Piao as a device to engage the worker (agricultural and industrial) in intellectual activity which will increase (or maintain) revolutionary spirit. To the extent to which the device succeeds, there will be no need to unleash another Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution with its excesses and dangers. How long can such a course continue? How long can criticism of Confucius and Lin Piao be meaningful in terms of its aims? Surely the time will come when some substitute must be produced. If such a time comes when the problems of succession are acute, revolution in a violent form could well be the result. For now, the revolution would seem to have reached an “Asia theory” end. It could flare up quickly and violently in response to events.