

## TWO YEARS OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION\*

K. S. Karol

FOR two years now, China has been in the grip of an unprecedented political fever. Millions of young people, workers and peasants have been involved in passionate demonstrations and bitter clashes, even in the most distant regions. Nevertheless, the rival groups which, we are told, are at each other's throats still proclaim their fidelity to the same man, Mao Tse-tung, and to the same Party, the Chinese CP.

The popular Press has given us little help in solving the puzzle this battle represents. Its taste for sensationalism, and—particularly in the United States—its hostility towards Chinese Communism, have led it to put the limelight on "shattering" items of news, even when they seemed hardly possible or even obviously false, and to draw the conclusion that civil war was imminent in China. The Chinese leaders' motives were clear: jealousy, spite and ambition; as for the masses of demonstrators, they were merely passive instruments in the hands of the new "war-lords" who were re-emerging inside the ranks of the Chinese Communist Party itself.

An analysis based on dubious information tendentiously interpreted had little chance of being confirmed by events. The Chinese civil war has not taken place. The Maoist and anti-Maoist "armies" have always evaporated just as their decisive confrontation was announced. The famous anti-Maoist generals, "masters of two-thirds of the provinces of China", have never made use of their power to explain to the world their disagreements with Mao Tse-tung. And little by little even those newspapers most eager for sensation have grown tired. They devote less space to Chinese affairs and account for their analytical mistakes by invoking the "irrational" character of the oriental mentality: "Don't try to understand those people, they are not like us".

Indeed, the Chinese do not behave like us, for they live in a profoundly different universe from ours. Their society has nothing in common with "mass-consumption societies" and is even very different

\* This essay is the Introduction to the American paperback edition (Doubleday and Wang, New York) of K. S. Karol's *China. The Other Communism*. This present essay of course refers in summary form to many aspects of the Chinese experience which are dealt with at length in the book itself.

from those societies of Eastern Europe called "the socialist societies". Certain Maoist notions are drawn from the traditions of Chinese civilization which has always had a strong bent towards moralizing; others are the result of egalitarian tendencies specific to the country's Communist movement. The conjunction of these two factors has fashioned a collectivist society which relies very heavily on ideology.

All this has profoundly affected the Chinese and made their country a "society of challenge" with its own dynamic, its own specific methods of political struggle, and one based on putting all other value systems to the test. This challenge cannot be ignored, for it has been thrown down by 700 million men and women, that is, a quarter of humanity. We resolve nothing by stating that "their reasons" are not ours, and it is an illusion to think that time will level out the difficulties of communication. Tomorrow's China is not going to return to the fold of the great family of nations who accept "Western values". On the contrary: the further the cultural revolution develops, the more China will consolidate her own value system. Those who do not try to understand it today will understand it even less tomorrow.

This is not the only reason why we should shake ourselves out of our indifference and reject the facile explanations given by the sensational Press. It is impossible to discuss the events in China if we forget the international context in which they occur. For several years now the United States has been ravaging Vietnam, one of China's small neighbours. In Washington last spring I heard American officials coolly admit that every step in escalation increased the "risk of a total confrontation" with China. Some told me this with apprehension, others with the hope that this new crusade would make possible the destruction of Communism in Asia once and for all. All admitted that if there were a conflict with China "the most powerful weapons" would be used. As we know what these weapons are, we may say that no nation has ever lived under such a terrible threat as that which weighs on China today. I fear that certain American experts have been joyfully spreading the news of the internal collapse of China simply to add weight to the arguments of those leaders in Washington who hope for this "total confrontation" and therefore seek to minimize "the risk" the United States would run in the event of a war with China. If for no other reason, the anti-Chinese hysteria which has been growing for some time in the Western Press is scandalous.

My purpose is not to promote the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution". The official theses from Peking on its origins and development seem to me often to be unconvincing, and I propose to give a critical examination of them here. I also think that certain requirements are neither bourgeois nor revisionist, but quite simply universal. For example, no "revolutionary necessity" can justify the falsification

of history or retrospective accusations against leaders who are in no position to establish the truth. The Chinese version of the conflict drawn up within the leading group in Peking seems to me to be tendentious, and it has certainly contributed to the perplexity of those Europeans who are trying to reach an unprejudiced understanding of the political battle in progress in China.

I shall not attempt to analyze here all the events which have taken place in China in the last two years, but rather demonstrate what in my view is one of the primordial aspects of the cultural revolution. While I was there I was able to confirm the importance the Chinese give to the problem of the relations between those who govern—the Party and its cadres—and those in whose name they govern—the worker and peasant masses. I am convinced that this problem is at the heart of the cultural revolution and that it is both the most important and the most interesting problem for us.



We are told by Peking that Mao Tse-tung is personally leading the cultural revolution. But he never speaks in public and writes no more theoretical texts. The Chinese Press occasionally quotes percussive comments he has made at closed meetings, or attributes to him such and such a passage from a Central Committee resolution. But none of these interventions is more than a few lines long. Otherwise Peking newspapers are content to reproduce one of the chairman's old texts or speeches, with the maximum stir; according to official commentators, these retain their significance and more than ever before they should serve as a compass for everyday action.

The Chinese answer to those who are astonished by this is that this exhumation is perfectly logical: the cultural revolution aims to restore in Party and country the norms of revolutionary conduct which have always been demanded by Chairman Mao and have only been violated in the last few years by "a handful of leaders, who, though members of the Party, were following the capitalist road". Mao appealed to the masses to unmask these false leaders and take away their power. So it is merely a matter of a return to the strict application of the "mass line" which made possible the people's expression of their egalitarian and proletarian feelings.

This argument is disputable, as we shall see later, but it does contain an element of truth. If we re-read today those of Mao's earlier writings which have been distributed widely during the cultural revolution, we are struck by the concern they already show to impose on the Party—and on the Army which issued from it—certain norms of democratic and egalitarian conduct. Mao has always said that Communists cannot force happiness on the people. As he wrote in 1943,<sup>1</sup> "Take the ideas

of the masses and concentrate them, then again go to the masses, so that they may firmly apply them and thus arrive at correct ideas for the work of direction—such is the basic method of leadership". A year later he was even plainer: "There are two principles here: one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses, who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them".<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning, the implementation of these directives ran into difficulties, for the Party, given its doctrinal assurance and its monolithic structure, has always been inclined to direct the areas it controlled in an authoritarian way. So "rectification campaigns" were necessary to induce modesty in cadres and militants and to inculcate in them an egalitarian spirit. In the historical section of my book, I gave an eye-witness account of the political organization of the "red zones" of China during the anti-Japanese War, and it seems to me to show that at that time the Maoists were practising a kind of "mass line". But revolutionary praxis is always easier during the phase of great revolutionary risings against an outside enemy or the old régime. The peasant masses wanted to get rid of the Japanese and demanded a radical land reform: the Party had no difficulty in adapting itself to these "ideas and needs of the people" which it had helped to arouse anyway.

It was no longer the same after the victory: then it became a question of governing a post-revolutionary society which was no longer living in the exaltation of the struggle, and of responding to the manifold and often contradictory aspirations of its various classes and social strata.

By unleashing the cultural revolution seventeen years after the foundation of the People's Republic, Mao Tse-tung has implicitly admitted that his Party was unable to apply the "mass line" under these new conditions. But at the same time he shows that he has not accepted defeat and still believes himself capable of redressing the situation. No other Communist leader in power has ever shown such perseverance and such an absolute fidelity to the ideas he had in the "heroic period". As a general rule, Communists always preach proletarian democracy before the revolution and rapidly resign themselves to the impossibility of practising it afterwards, to such an extent that their promises in this matter have become part of a liturgy which no one now takes seriously. Mao's determination to hazard everything in order to fulfil his democratic promises has therefore constituted one of the first "inexplicable" surprises of the cultural revolution.

Mao's earlier writings may be witness of his fidelity to himself, but obviously they do not explain why the famous "mass line" was not applied—or if it was, not sufficiently—after the foundation of the

People's Republic of China in 1949. That the responsibility for this should be attributed solely to "bad leaders" seems hardly credible, particularly as the leaders in question nearly all—despite what Peking commentators say today—played a remarkable part in the past. There must be deeper and less subjective reasons, but if we are to understand them it is essential to glance briefly at what happened in China during the years leading up to the cultural revolution.



Thanks to its combativity during the anti-Japanese War and its exemplary administration in the "red zones", the CP has acquired throughout China a reputation for "incorruptible justice". But as a political force it was only solidly established in the North-West and the North, where it had set up its principal "liberated bases". In the great coastal cities and throughout the huge area west of the Yangtze the Communists were negligible in number. Also, the militants from these regions had taken the road to Yenan, Mao's capital since 1936, during the period of the anti-Japanese War.

The Communist victory in China came sooner than Mao himself had expected. Almost overnight it was necessary to take charge of a country of continental dimensions and staff it with hardly a million militants. In such conditions, the CP could not but stretch out its hands to anyone who agreed to work under its aegis. It had to its advantage one very favourable prejudice: most Chinese had heaved a sigh of relief as they saw the wars that had ravaged their country for decades come to an end, and they were ready to collaborate with the "new democracy". But the Communists had no real intention of sharing power with anyone. Despite their numerical weakness they allocated to themselves all positions of real responsibility.

Restoring order to the country took four years and was achieved with few hitches despite the Korean War which took many Communist cadres away into the Armv. Then, in 1953, when the country was at last back on its rails, the CP decided to push it hard in the socialist direction. It further strengthened administrative centralization and the Party had to close ranks. Mao still repeated that Communists should not be authoritarian, but his new policy did not allow much dialectical flexibility in practice.

A year later the Chinese People's Republic had acquired its definitive institutional framework and had adopted its constitution. The latter was not a servile copy of the Soviet model, but was largely inspired by it: the same electoral system, the same Parliament (though it was called the People's Congress rather than the Supreme Soviet), the same principle of administrative subdivision. Then the Chinese set in motion their first five-year plan, worked out with Soviet help and

based on methods tested in the USSR during the industrialization period. Naturally, the country's political life was also aligned along the traditional rules of the other Communist countries. But as a consequence, these rigid Chinese institutions gave little space to any expression of "ideas and needs" from the base.

And then, in 1957, at the end of the first five-year plan—which everyone regarded as a great success—Mao suddenly changed course. In Peking today they say that he made this decision after his journey to the USSR where he was appalled by the ideological level of foreign Communist leaders, and realized the ravages that bureaucratization had made in the Communist élite of the European socialist countries. From then on he made it a point of honour not to govern his country as they did.

No doubt this anecdote is apocryphal, for Mao was very well received in the USSR and was the major celebrity at the international Communist meeting in Moscow. It is no less true that in 1957 the whole Communist world was at a turning-point. After Stalin's death it was no longer possible to maintain a system of power based on the unlimited monopoly of the Party as a governmental, political and economic structure, represented by bureaucrats which the leading group co-opted at will. Under pressure from the economic growth of the society this system became impracticable in the USSR, but despite the beginnings of an examination of their consciences at the XXth Congress in 1956, the Soviet leaders did not dare take the path of de-bureaucratization. They decided to preserve the Party's monolithism and political power while making concessions to the economists and technocrats so that they would revive economic law and bring a new balance to the society. The leaders no longer counted on the effect of their revolutionary appeals to the population and relied even more than in the past on material incentives to encourage workers in production. They further postponed the realization of the Communist utopia and accepted high differentials in incomes, functions and powers in their country for a long time to come. The opening to the West was one of the consequences of these options.

As far as Mao was concerned, this new policy ran counter to his egalitarian beliefs and his profound confidence in the revolutionary aspirations of the masses: in short, it negated his whole personal career and his convictions. He sensed in it the first sign of an alignment of the USSR on the mode! of mass consumption societies and of the weakening of its anti-imperialist spirit. For all these reasons, if he could not prevent the Russians from following this road, he was still determined that China should take the opposite path. That is why, as soon as he had returned from Moscow, he began to work out a new "general line", the line of the Great Leap Forward and of the

people's communes. He proclaimed the necessity of giving absolute priority to political and moral incentives for the workers.

This desire to find a "short-cut to Communism", affirmed just as the other parties in power were conceding the need to put off until later the construction of the ideal society, constituted a barely concealed challenge to the USSR. But it does not seem to have aroused any resistance within the leading group in China. We know almost nothing about the internal debates which took place at that date, but, paradoxically, the present peculiar practices of the Cultural Revolution give us an indirect confirmation of this absence of opposition. In fact, to demonstrate the culpability of those leaders in disgrace such as Liu Shao-chi, the Chinese Press turns to retrospective interpretations of their old writings or speeches. This procedure is unpleasantly like Stalinist methods, but, unlike the old Soviet public prosecutors, the Chinese do not seem to go so far as forging false pieces of evidence. The texts they "reinterpret" were actually written by the accused leaders, in a quite different context, of course.

It is certain that if Liu Shao-chi or any other of the future "revisionists" had made his opposition to Mao's "general line" manifest in **1958**, his intervention then would today be plastered on all the walls of China as the final proof of his treason. If nothing of that kind has happened, it is because it has proved impossible to find the slightest really compromising speech in the Party archives. Also Liu-Shao-chi has twice appeared before red-guard students to make his self-criticism, and though the texts of his speeches have never been made public, the Press has revealed that he "had the impudence to maintain that he never attacked the people's communes, even during the 'three difficult years'".

However, **1958** was certainly the year of the decisive turning-point for Chinese Communism. At ten years' distance, it is easier to see that the Maoist heresy within the Communist world began with the Great Leap Forward. It was also the date at which the first seeds of the future cultural revolution were sown.

The Chinese claim that the **1958** "general line" was born of spontaneous pressure from the masses of the people and more particularly from what they call the "poor peasantry and the lower strata of the middle peasantry". They do not make clear how this desire at the base could have been expressed and imposed on the Party, but it does seem that Mao and his team sincerely believed that the immense majority of the "Chinese poor" aspired to a rapid change in their mode of life. Far from thinking that they were brutally imposing their solution on an amorphous if not unwilling mass, they believed that they were expressing in socialist terms what the peasants wanted in a confused way. It is a fact that they granted the communes considerable

administrative autonomy, urged them to form and run their own militia, and distributed millions of guns to them. Stalin would not have dreamed of giving arms to the peasants during the period of forced collectivization in the USSR for he had no illusions as to the popularity of his policy.

Mao, on the other hand, was convinced that the communes corresponded to the needs and desires of the masses, and he expressed this conviction in a few famous sentences: "Striking among the characteristics of the 600 million inhabitants of China are poverty and destitution. Bad in appearance, these things are good in reality. Poverty impels towards change, action and revolution. Everything is possible with a blank sheet of paper; you can write and draw on it the newest and most beautiful things."

From then on, absolute priority was given to the formation of the new man and the introduction of Communist morality throughout the society. Mao was also confident in the productive capacity of the masses inspired by the communes, and this explains his surprising optimism about the miracles of the Great Leap Forward. He was soon undeceived, but the economic disappointments of the next few years never undermined his conviction that he had chosen the correct line: for him, the raising of production was not the principal goal; it was merely the "additional benefit" of his policy.

The "Three Banners of the Party": Long live the "General Line"!, Long live the People's Communes!, Long live the Great Leap Forward!, survived even after the reintroduction of flexibility into methods of economic management and the abandonment of the production targets set in 1958. Repainted every year in red letters, these slogans still decorate every wall, town and country, in China. Officially, the Maoist "general line" has not changed since 1958.

To trust Western criteria of economic efficiency, China's whole "irrationality" consists in this belief of Mao's in the possibility of moulding socialist man immediately and of organizing economic projects according to this priority. But Mao did not choose this line against the advice of his "administrative and technocratic comrades", as some claim today. At the beginning it was adopted without difficulty by a leading group formed in the same school as Mao and impregnated with the same ideas. These men were accustomed to express themselves freely in front of him and had not been terrorized by bloody purges in the Stalinist style. In itself alone, the absence of disagreement on the 1958 line proves that the Chinese leaders had, during the long struggle they had led together, forged a common vision of the world, and above all of their own society. Mao had expressed it best because he had the greatest gifts as a theoretician and was the best leader of men, but no-one disputed his analyses since they

stemmed from a common ideological heritage. Anyway, Liu Shao-chi had been the first to proclaim, at the Seventh Congress of the Chinese CP at Yen-an in 1945, that "Chairman Mao's thought should guide our Party". When, in 1958, the Chinese leaders decided to venture China on an unexplored road, full of risks, they reinforced the ties binding them together in the same fidelity to Mao's doctrine. Stage by stage, to cope with the difficulties that arose and in response to the Soviet challenge, they were obliged to seek out solutions to a multitude of practical problems, but whatever their divergence of views on the measures to be taken, their basic option and their analytical tools were held in common. There was never any question of any of them suggesting a radical step backwards to bring them into line with the Soviets, who had become more and more foreign to their essential ideological convictions.

The cultural revolution provoked divisions within the Chinese leading group for reasons which have no direct relationship to the debate which is tearing apart the international Communist movement. The Russians have never found a single responsible Chinese to speak from Moscow against "Mao and his group", even though their propaganda tries to spread the belief that the majority of Chinese Communists are anti-Maoist. Similarly, no Chinese Communist has made any attempt to seek refuge in the West to bear witness for his sacked friends. No group of red guards or "revolutionary rebels" has profited from the freedom of expression during the cultural revolution to stick up a single anti-Maoist poster.

So we are forced to recognize that a Chinese Communist would regard a break with "Mao's thought" as the negation of his whole past life and all his convictions. For him, to stop being a Maoist would mean to stop being a Communist, to stop being a revolutionary, to stop being a good Chinese. That no-one had reneged on Mao on the occasion of the Cultural Revolution does prove that all Chinese Communists are Maoists, whatever the popular press would like to think.



Belonging to the same spiritual family does not guarantee unanimity under all circumstances. There were internal dramas and conflicts among the Chinese Communists well before the Cultural Revolution. For example, after the first year of the Great Leap Forward, certain setbacks gave rise to an agitated debate during the session of the Central Committee which took place at Lushan in August 1959. The Chinese press mentions it frequently today, eight years later, so as to stigmatize Marshal Peng Teh-huai's attitude, which has become the symbol of the "revisionist line".

Peng Teh-huai was a Party veteran and had great prestige as the

Army commander and Minister of Defence. He addressed a letter to Mao Tse-tung on the 14th July, 1959, in which he described the situation in China "in the darkest colours". We do not know the full contents of this letter, but a quotation published recently gives some idea of the Marshal's pessimism: "If Chinese peasants and workers were not as good as they are, we would long ago have seen events comparable to those in Hungary and we would have been forced to appeal to Soviet troops for aid."

If we are to believe the revelations published or announced today, Peng Teh-huai felt that it was dangerous to distribute arms to the militia and entrust to each people's commune the responsibility for its own small "military force". According to him, what was necessary was the rapid formation of a well structured and very mobile army, capable of intervening in good time to put down any revolt that might break out. He also asked that the Chinese Army should be provided with strategic equipment and that the frontiers should be fortified so as to prevent any of China's enemies from taking advantage of its internal difficulties.

Peng Teh-huai did not stand as a candidate for the chairmanship of the Party and did not aspire to supplant Mao. His demands were limited in principle to the military sector and there is nothing to show that in his letter he challenged the Party's policies as a whole. But it is obvious that the solutions suggested by Pen Teh-huai were incompatible with Maoism's social strategy. For Mao, the army had always been seen as an essential political instrument, an exemplary embodiment of the proletarian spirit, broadly destined to play the part the theoreticians of Marxism used to assign to the working class. To lock the soldiers up in barracks instead of making them work among the masses and propagate the new way of life would have been to sacrifice most of the great aspirations formulated in the "general line".

So the Central Committee categorically rejected Peng Teh-huai's proposals and removed him from his post as Minister of Defence, entrusting it to Lin Piao, a convinced supporter of the Maoist idea of the people's army. The final resolution was even harsh and insulting to Peng Teh-huai, who was referred to as a right opportunist, a representative of the bourgeoisie, and accused of only having struggled courageously previously in the selfish hope of drawing some profit from the victory. But it closed on an unexpected note: "The Central Committee judges that the Party should continue to adopt a benevolent attitude to Peng Teh-huai so as to help him to recognize and correct his errors. . . . He may retain his title as Member of the Political Bureau." Today it is suggested that this generosity was due to manoeuvring behind the scenes by Liu Shao-chi. Whether it is real or

fictional, this intervention did not save the unfortunate Marshal for long: he has since played practically no rôle in the political or military life of China and three years later he was deprived of his title as Member of the Political Bureau—once again in secret.

If we have lingered over this episode, it is because, since the Lushan Session, the politicization of the Chinese army had gone from strength to strength. Although he tended to keep out of the limelight, Lin Piao was carefully preparing the efficient tool that the People's Army has become during the Cultural Revolution. It was even the Army that had the honour of being the first to receive the little red book of quotations from Chairman Mao, in 1964, when it was still unknown to the wider public. Within the Army the Chinese Communists made a sort of laboratory experiment so as to discover what were the possibilities of arousing a vast debate at the base. Finally, from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, it was the Army that the Maoists entrusted with the running of very important sectors of the economy, thanks to which all the disturbances of the last two years have not had too serious repercussions on production.



Another significant episode occurred in 1960 when Khrushchev presented the Maoists with a veritable ultimatum, threatening to withdraw his experts and suspend Soviet aid if China did not come into line with the USSR's international political strategy. As we know, the Chinese refused to give way and the Soviet reprisals did incalculable damage to their economy. The Chinese press provides few revelations of the debates which took place on this question at the top of the Party, and no-one is accused of having suggested capitulation. But in September 1967 it did publish a short directive that Mao Tse-tung issued to Party leaders at that time:

"Chairman Mao has personally weighed up the experience obtained during the Great Leap Forward, and has formulated the famous 'Anchan Steel Works Charter' in opposition to the 'Magnitogorsk Steel Works Charter' produced by the Soviet revisionists. It established five basic principles: Continue to put politics in command; Reinforce the Party leadership; Unleash a great mass movement; Institute the system whereby cadres participate in productive labour and workers in management; Revise out-dated rules and regulations and establish close collaboration between cadres, workers and technicians so as to proceed vigorously with the technical revolution."

No doubt this directive reflects Mao's anger at discovering a return to the traditional methods of material encouragement as an incentive to the workers, for it reaffirms his dearest principle: "Continue to put politics in command." Despite the enormous economic difficulties, he

was not prepared to give up the priorities of the Great Leap Forward and put forward "leftist" solutions: recourse to mass movements and a greater participation of workers in management. These slogans were not easily applicable in a crisis period and everything leads us to believe that during discussions his comrades succeeded in convincing him that it was necessary to wait for a more propitious moment to unleash the movement he wished for.

Today, we are simply told that the "revisionist" leaders exploited the "three difficult years" to make concessions to capitalist tendencies in all sectors of economic life. For example, they authorized the peasants to cultivate private plots and to re-establish a free market in unrationed agricultural products. Their obsession with production was such that Teng Hsiao-ping, Secretary-General of the Party and at present the principal accused beside Liu Shao-chi, said in so many words: "As long as it increases production even individual exploitation is allowable; it matters little whether a cat is black or white, if it catches the rat it is a good cat."

Obviously these words have been quoted to demonstrate his preference for "the capitalist road" and his indifference or even hostility towards rural social policy. But if we recall the country's tragic situation, almost on the edge of famine, we can see that Liu Shao-chi's and Teng Hsiao-ping's "revisionist" concessions were simply emergency measures justified by the persistence of petit bourgeois instincts among part of the Chinese peasantry. Speeches seen as incriminating today are not enough to prove that the "deviationists" were resigned to this factual situation once and for all and that they had no plans to struggle for the transformation of the peasant's mentality.

In reality, once the situation had been stabilized, the Tenth Session of the Central Committee of the Chinese CP decided in 1962 to launch a "socialist education movement" on a national scale so as to "put politics in command" more than ever before. The resolution adopted at this session called for "a tit-for-tat reply to the capitalist and feudal forces which have launched violent offensives against us". In other words, the Party meant that it was not at all prepared to tolerate manifestations of the old individualist, selfish spirit from anyone whatsoever.



The Chinese Communists did not recognize the image of their future reflected by the mirror of Soviet society. They always aspired to follow their own road, even if it was merely to avoid the errors of the Stalinist period which they attributed to historical conditions peculiar to Russian society. But for all that, they were not unaware of the similarities between their own experience and that of the Soviets. They

saw the development of the Soviet Union since Stalin's death as a tragedy, and not only because of the singular complications it introduced into the relations between the two states. The sight of what seemed to them to be the scandalous behaviour of Stalin's heirs and the depoliticization of the new Russian generation caused them to fear that the same phenomena might one day occur in China in one form or another.

The Maoists always had difficulty with the analysis of the bureaucratic phenomenon within post-revolutionary societies. Only during the Cultural Revolution did they develop the thesis that Khrushchev had been able to usurp power in the USSR because the Party gave too much power to its highest leaders and allowed them to force the militants to execute any policy they chose. But in 1962 there was not yet any talk of the mortal danger the Chinese revolution would run at the hands of a "Chinese Khrushchev" and the major preoccupation was the situation at the base of the Party.

The leaders of the Chinese CP knew very well that the numbers of their adherents had increased by fantastic proportions: from 1,200,000 at the end of the anti-Japanese War, to 17 millions in 1957 and probably 20 millions in 1962. So the majority of militants had been recruited at a time when there were no longer any risks and many advantages in being a Communist. So they had good reason to suspect the sincerity and quality of these new adherents and did not hesitate to affirm in the Central Committee Resolution of 1962 that "certain anti-social elements had succeeded in infiltrating the ruling organs of communes, wards, districts, prefectures and even at the provincial and central level".

Now the Chinese Communists believe that nothing can be achieved in their society unless their militants give an example of disinterested conduct. As Mao has always said, the true Communist is always the one who takes on the heaviest burdens, is free from all selfishness and devotes his whole life to the service of the people. It was because he had known how to form a Party animated with this spirit that he had been able to mobilize the peasant masses for the anti-Japanese war and to rouse them from their age-old resignation. In his eyes this victory proved how right the founders of Chinese civilization were when they claimed that "man is born good" and that it is always possible to teach him to behave virtuously, but only on condition that the ruling élite be a living illustration of these virtues. But for Mao the foundation of the People's Republic of China was not an end in itself; it was simply the beginning of a "long march" towards socialism, and he was more insistent than ever on the maintenance of high moral standards among Party members.

What he felt should characterize the new Communist élite was first

of all the absence of an elite spirit. Communists should demonstrate every day that they were incorruptible and were not seeking to profit by their power to acquire any material advantage. The "socialist education movement" included extremely severe demands on the cadres who were asked to participate in productive labour and live on a level with the masses. Wherever in China I met provincial or local leaders, they boasted to me of their periodic work in the communes or in industrial undertakings. Factory managers never failed to take me into the workshops where they worked a day and a half a week as simple labourers. And even the intellectuals spoke proudly of their long stays in people's communes.

Naturally, all this was accompanied by massive propaganda in favour of a collectivist attitude and denunciations of old customs, offspring of the old culture. The need to be "red and expert"—red coming before expert—was heavily underlined and my impression was that no student graduating from a technical faculty could hope to make a peaceful technocratic career in China.

But it must be admitted that in all this there was just a whiff of paternalism. For after their manual exercises among the masses, each cadre and manager returned to his own office and continued to take decisions for which he was only answerable to his superiors, not to the base. It was clear to me that Chinese functionaries lived more modestly than those of other Communist countries, but it was also obvious that the workers' committees in the factories or the peasant assemblies in the communes had a purely imaginary rôle. In conformity with the spirit of their institutions, Party members still held all the power in China, and the egalitarian methods demanded by the "socialist education movement" simply gave them a good conscience in the execution of their duties.

Of course, the intense campaign for an egalitarian attitude was not without effect in the country. It certainly affected Chinese workers, particularly young workers, by awakening in them demands towards the cadres. It also aroused the desire for real participation in running the country, for if they had to work in the name of politics, it was also essential that politics should not be a meaningless word. Ideas cannot have any mobilizing power unless they correspond to a living reality and are confirmed in practice.

Without the "socialist education movement" there would not have been those millions of young enthusiasts who, during the Cultural Revolution, sported the red guards' arm-band, formed committees of "revolutionary rebels" and treated even high-placed leaders as "revisionists" without any regard for their positions or their past merits. But this explosion was a very eloquent testimony to the fact that certain Communist cadres had not in the past behaved in exemplary dis-

interested fashion, and that they no longer enjoyed the confidence of the masses. Manual work and all the other Maoist rites and customs were merely palliatives and were inadequate to suppress the basic contradiction between the popular egalitarian aspirations of the régime on the one hand and the existence of institutions which gave unlimited power to an uncontrolled bureaucracy on the other.

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Every Chinese leader knew that the Cultural Revolution would be the end result of the "socialist education movement", though few among them could have predicted what form and what extent this future criticism from the base would take. We now know that the principle of a vast national discussion was adopted at an unofficial session of the Central Committee which took place in 1964.<sup>9</sup> It even set up a commission composed of five leaders and chaired by Peng Chen, the mayor of Peking, to prepare for it.

By common consent, it was also decided that the universities should be the site of a trial run. This is understandable, and not just because Chinese students had been particularly distinguished in the political arena since the beginning of the century.

For the Maoists, the collectivist ethic they were propagating in China represented a theoretical distillate of the confused aspirations of the "Chinese poor". So the oppressed of yesterday, the victims of the old régime, were the most ready to receive the ethic and to behave virtuously. But the others, beneficiaries of the old régime and marked by the old culture, represented human material less suitable for socialist education. In principle, no-one was excluded or condemned in advance, but Mao himself stressed that where non-proletarian strata were concerned, "ideological re-education is a long-term affair which has to be conducted patiently and minutely. It cannot be hoped that a few lessons or meetings will change the ideology formed in the course of a life-time".

Given these conditions, it would have been logical for old proletarians to occupy all the vital ideological sectors. But in practice the need to develop education at all levels obliged the Maoists to entrust teaching responsibilities to intellectuals who had been formed during the bourgeois period and who were therefore little adapted to a proletarian attitude. The leaders certainly hoped for the rapid emergence of a proletarian intellectual element made up of the children of workers and peasants, and they favoured the latter in every possible way during their studies. But the results turned out to be disappointing: students of bourgeois origin always did better in universities and high schools. This situation was unacceptable to the Communists. They suspected that teachers of bourgeois origin were favouring

students from the same background and questioned the very nature of an education more accessible to children whose parents had been members of the privileged classes than to proletarians.

So educational reform was on the agenda, and the leaders were prepared to call for the participation of students in the debate the better to isolate the source of evil. Finally, in February 1966, Peng Chen and his commission presented a report on the Cultural Revolution. This has never been published and we do not even know with certainty who made up this commission. It is supposed that it was Lou Tung-yi, Director of Party Propaganda, Lo Jui-ching, Army Chief of Staff, and Marshal Ho Lung, Minister for Youth and Sports, since, like Feng Cheng, they have all been forcibly retired since. But we do know with certainty that the fifth member of the commission, Kang Cheng, Deputy-Member of the Political Bureau, dissociated himself from his colleagues and obtained the rejection of their report. On the 16th May 1966, the Central Committee sent all CP organizations a circular reflecting Kang Cheng's views and condemning the other members of the commission.

In no political party can a member of a commission in a minority obtain the condemnation of the majority without the aid of an appeal to a higher authority or after a discussion before a wider forum. But no Central Committee session took place during the period of the trial of strength between the two tendencies. So it is obvious that the central apparatus, probably at the request of Mao Tse-tung, decided in favour of Kang Cheng.

Establishing this is not trivial, since the decision was crucial for the whole ulterior development of the Cultural Revolution. According to his accusers, Peng Cheng wanted the Cultural Revolution to be a new Campaign of a Hundred Flowers, closely controlled by the Party. Kang Cheng, on the contrary, demanded that it should allow proletarian students to express their left criticisms against anyone, including Communists, who were hindering the real diffusion of the "Thought of Chairman Mao". For the former, the Cultural Revolution was not to call into question university authorities and institutions; the latter, on the contrary, regarded them as reactionary and outmoded from the start.

By coming down on the side of Kang Cheng, the central apparatus—and therefore Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping in the first place—agreed to open the way to radical criticism in the universities and were prepared to sacrifice a certain number of Communists who were too unpopular among the students. As is understandable, Peng Cheng bitterly defended his point of view, and if we can believe the red guards' wall-posters he even attempted a *coup d'état*, but this seems very doubtful. At any rate, this first episode of the Cultural Revolu-

tion already showed unaccustomed violence and passion in the discussions at the top of the Party. Every Chinese leader visibly felt that they were initiating a process far deeper and far more dangerous to the Party than any of their previous campaigns had been. This time they were accepting a real participation of the base in the discussion from the very beginning.

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Peng Cheng's retirement was known in Peking from the 17th May 1966. In the universities agitation had already been smouldering for several weeks and the students immediately understood that they should do something. Everything seemed to show that the Party's unofficial rules had lapsed since street demonstrations were suddenly allowed against a man who was a member of the Political Bureau and Mayor of the capital and who had not yet been officially accused or denounced in the press. At that moment, the papers were up in arms against certain intellectuals whose writings implied a right opposition to Mao Tse-tung, and this campaign cast suspicion on the morality and intentions of all teachers, or even of all intellectuals. Also—though there is no real proof of this—the split at the top of the Party must have stirred up activity in support of the various tendencies in student circles. No doubt Kang Cheng's supporters were propagating their views to whoever was prepared to listen, and urging them into action.

On 25th May 1966, eight students from the philosophy faculty of Peking University stuck up their ta-tse-bm—a newspaper written in large characters as a sign of anger—containing an attack on the rector, and in particular proclaiming: "You would like to hang on to your jobs so as to sabotage the Cultural Revolution. We tell you that a mantis can no more resist the wheel of a motor-car than ants could bring down a giant tree. You are daydreaming! Revolutionary intellectuals, now is the time to march into battle! . . . Let us break out of our tutelage and sweep resolutely away all perverse and malignant elements, as well as all counter-revolutionary revisionists of the Khrushchevite type!"

The Party apparatus could not remain quiet before this apparent revolt of the students. So it despatched "work teams" into the universities instructed to carry out a sort of purge and to take over the leadership of the student movement. As soon as they arrived these teams dismissed the majority of those in charge and organized rather strange political examinations for all Party members. Communists were locked into classes for the unrelieved study of the works of Chairman Mao and were not allowed to go home without the approval of the new masters of the field. Each had to make a self-criticism and

this had to be accepted before he could leave his comrades imprisoned with the volumes of Chairman Mao.

Peking fell into the grip of a strange climate of insecurity. No-one was quite sure what was going on in the universities, nor what sense there was in this purge, but everyone guessed that something out of the ordinary must have been decided on by the top leadership of the Party, and that changes, maybe very unpleasant changes, were in the offing. Later, the red guards, and, following them, the official press, accused Liu Shao-chi of having deliberately fomented this "white terror" atmosphere in the hope of "hurting a large number so as to protect a handful of bad leaders". No doubt Liu Shao-chi was responsible for the despatch of the "work teams" into the universities; but it seems likely that his intention was to re-assert the central authority and direct the fire of the purge—which now seemed inevitable—towards the lower ranks of the Party.

Mao came out against this method. At the end of July 1966 he returned to Peking, called for the immediate recall of the "work teams" and convened an extraordinary session of the Central Committee. So within a few months the cultural revolution had passed through two stages of escalation. The first had initiated a vast discussion in student circles; the second ended with the suppression of the "work teams", the only means at the disposal of the CP's central apparatus to lead and control the debate which had already been set in motion.



The Chinese press has published acres of commentary but very little hard fact about the XIth Session of the Central Committee, which was decisive for the development of the Cultural Revolution and lasted almost two weeks. It is obvious that the Party hierarchy was re-organized during this meeting, for certain leaders received very important titles while others were relegated to secondary posts. But even on a matter such as this no explanation has been published.

But the Chinese press does inform us that Chairman Mao opened the session on 1st August 1966 by posting in the hall of the Central Committee a hand-written poster entitled: "Turn the fire on headquarters!" In it he told in a few sentences of his admiration for the young rebels who had distinguished themselves in the universities for fifty days, and his disapproval of those who had tried to stifle their voices. He added that this incorrect action was no accident, but should be linked to the deviations which had come to light during the past few years; all this proved that a group of bourgeois disguised as Communists had installed themselves in the very heart of the Party's central apparatus.

Today, more than a year later, official commentators add that this

poster was primarily aimed at Liu Shao-chi. Mao Tse-tung was already sure that he was the candidate for the rôle of "Chinese Khrushchev", the future revisionist usurper of power in China: "During his long struggle against the most highly placed (of those following the capitalist road), Chairman Mao had realized his ambitious nature and saw that he represented the latent evil and major danger for our Party."

But if his mind was made up, why did he not call on the Central Committee to eliminate this dangerous character immediately? Because, replies the Chinese press, "according to Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, the destruction of the headquarters of the bourgeoisie demands an unreserved mobilization of the masses and not the purely organizational measure of dismissing officials at all levels".

But this *post factum* explanation seems very unconvincing. If you want to mobilize the masses against someone you usually point out to them who it is and what crimes he has committed. But Liu Shao-chi, though reduced in rank, remained one of the most important leaders of the country and at Mao Tse-tung's side he took part in the many public demonstrations of the red guards which took place in Tien An Menh Square throughout the autumn of 1966. How could the masses be expected to discover an enemy's face beneath the features of a man who was still one of Chairman Mao's closest companions? In addition, how do you explain that this adversary was personally signing Central Committee appeals inviting the people to struggle against "officials following the capitalist road", i.e. against himself and his friends? Finally, it should be added that the same papers that claim that Liu Shao-chi's fate was sealed during the XIth Session of the Central Committee also write that "the bourgeois and revisionist deviationists *were unmasked* during the great battles of the Cultural Revolution", i.e. long after the fateful meeting of August 1966.

These inconsistencies in the official version suggests that the Central Committee's debate was less personalized and hinged more on the basic problem: what rôle should the Party play in the Cultural Revolution, and what structures should it acquire as a result of it? This was the question which had already been dividing the Chinese leadership for several months, and it would seem logical that they should have carried on with this discussion during the two weeks of plenary session of the Central Committee.

Mao Tse-tung had intervened twice, in May and in July 1966, on the side of the "left" which called for considerable autonomy for the young rebels at the base. He had even attacked the central apparatus for its unfortunate attempts to hinder the critical expression of these future red guards. So he wanted the movement at the base to expand, and on this point he probably had no difficulty in rallying the majority

if not all of his comrades. But what should Party members' attitude to this movement be? Should they act collectively, after preliminary discussion in cells and sections? Should they carry out directives from higher up which the Party centre would continue to provide as events developed?

Mao's answer to all these questions was negative. He asked the Party centre to stay aloof and nominated a "Central Group for the Cultural Revolution" chaired by a theoretician, Chen Po-ta and composed of old Communists who, however, with the exception of Kang Cheng, had never worked in the Party's central apparatus. And even this group was supposed to give out general directives and not to direct the everyday action of the red guards. As for the militants at the base, they should plunge into the movement on an individual basis by joining the group of their choice, for according to Mao this trial would be the best political school for them, and the best way of verifying their revolutionary ardour.

- - The Party represents an irreplaceable tool of the revolution—Mao has said it a thousand times and the famous Little Red Books open with quotations on this theme. Throughout the cultural revolution the demonstrators have always chanted: "The land is wide and the seas are deep, but the Party is wider than the land and deeper than the sea." So Mao Tse-tung could never have called for the destruction of the Chinese CP. But he did ask at the XIth Session of the Central Committee that its apparatus, in which he no longer had confidence, should virtually go on leave and show itself as little as possible. Nothing suggests that he proposed a structural reform of the CP or a vast purge at the base; on the contrary some remarks as to the possibility of recuperating 95 per cent of the old cadres are attributed to him.

Certainly, only someone with Mao's authority and daring could have brought before the Central Committee, made up in general of members of the apparatus, a proposition which amounted to their suicide. In theory they all believed in the wisdom of the proletarian masses and it is possible to find in their past speeches as many references to the necessity to carry out the "mass line" as in Mao's. But in practice they had every reason to fear the minority of young purists, already grouped into red guards which were arousing popular anger against them, because they were of necessity responsible for all the anomalies of the old system. But a crowd urged on by young *enragés* is rarely disposed to listen to explanations as to the profound reasons for certain past decisions and the inevitable gaps between doctrinal absolutes and their every day realization.

So there must have been a sharp clash on the Central Committee one day, when the complete proceedings have been published, we shall know for certain what were the positions of Liu Shao-chi, Teng

Hsiao-ping and all the others later removed from their posts in the course of these debates. I suggest they must have been torn between their confidence in Mao Tse-tung's political instincts and their uncertainty as to the radical solutions he had called for. Apart from the three members of Feng Cheng's Commission—baptized by the press the "May 66 Group"—no important leader was removed from his post during the August 1966 Session. Indeed, in the final resolution a clause was introduced forbidding the press to attack Central Committee members by name. Obviously, this was a last precaution before everyone was handed over to the tribunal at the base.

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The apparatus of a Party with twenty million members and controlling all responsible posts in an enormous country obviously cannot be set completely aside from one day to the next. The ties between its members are too strong to be suddenly dissolved on the orders of the Central Committee. What is more, no-one was asked to go on holiday and await the run of events: on the contrary, everyone had to participate actively in them to demonstrate their revolutionary attitudes. So it would seem to me that the latent tendencies within the Chinese leadership must have come fully into the open during the cultural revolution, without this implying any intention to plot Mao Tse-tung's downfall.

The fragmented nature of the movement at the base anyway favoured such intervention. No group of red guards was formally invested as representative of the "thought of Chairman Mao". They vied with each other in exaggerated revolutionary proposals, some of which were so obviously unrealistic that no-one could have applied them. For example, thanks to this enthusiastic action from the base, in August 1966 all Peking's squares were rebaptized "The East is Red" and every major artery became "Anti-imperialism Avenue", and "Anti-revisionism Road". After two weeks of this no-one any longer knew his address in Peking and the "Central Group for the Cultural Revolution" was obliged to make the discreet suggestion to the red guards that they restore the old names to these avenues and squares.

What is more, the young militants who arrived in a factory and proposed the immediate suppression of all bonuses and the equalization of all wages might very well recite passages from Chairman Mao on egalitarianism, but the workers could answer them with other quotations which recognized the utility of collective bonuses or asked the workers to run their own affairs themselves. The argument remained within the framework of Maoist orthodoxy and a Communist could support one side or the other without compromising himself—and without any backward thoughts.

Within administrations the base was invited to criticize the old officials but it was also required to distinguish between those of them who were "good, satisfactory, bad or execrable". Different opinions were allowed as was the forming of groups and posting of notices to defend one point of view or another. These kinds of discussion produced an accentuation of division everywhere, to the point where a Shanghai taxi-driver could say to a French diplomat: "Here, no-one agrees with anyone else."

Throughout this first period of the great debate, which lasted until the end of 1966, highly-placed leaders such as Liu Shao-chi were rarely attacked by the red guards and never by the press. The latter anyway restricted itself to a global enthusiasm for the young critics' action, thus encouraging the most intransigent fraction, but it gave no indication as to where the battle was to go from there.

This completely changed in January 1967 with the introduction of the cultural revolution into industrial undertakings. Only then did the press accuse the "bourgeois deviationists" of corrupting the working class by promising it material advantages and even distributing retrospective bonuses so as to control the "revolutionary rebels" and prevent changes in the leading personnel and management methods. This indignant outcry was accompanied by the publication of articles by Chairman Mao directed against "economism" and material incentives for the workers.

It is difficult to tell whether these accusations had any basis in fact, and whether the old officials were really trying to secure for themselves an increase in popularity among the workers by distributing to them significant sums of money. Although we have no proof, we might guess that the workers themselves profited by the freedom to elect their own committee to ask for certain material advantages as well. In the absence of precise directives from above, local leaders must have found it somewhat difficult to decide whether they ought to oppose the demands of the masses or on the contrary whether it was not more in line with the "thought of Chairman Mao" to satisfy them.

The Central Committee had to make an urgent appeal to the workers of Shanghai in Mao Tse-tung's own name that work should be resumed and the crime of "economism" put an end to. A few days later, the Shanghai Commune was created, thanks to the joint action of sixteen "revolutionary rebel" committees assisted by Army cadres and a few officials from the old Party apparatus. This was the victory of the "triple alliance" which was immediately promoted by the press and proposed as a model for the new institutions.

Paradoxically, it was at this precise moment, just as the cultural revolution seemed to be entering its constructive phase, that the first

barely veiled attacks on the "Chinese Khrushchev", Liu Shao-chi, also began. It seems that there was a new trial of strength at the summit, for even the "Central Group for the Cultural Revolution" was reorganized. Tao Chou, one of its most eminent members, in charge of propaganda, was suddenly eliminated and became the target of extremely violent criticism. Today some Chinese explain in private that Tao Chou had been "infiltrated" into the leadership of the Cultural Revolution by the old controllers of the CP apparatus and by "unmasking" him, the masses had removed the last obstacle preventing them from openly criticizing the "Chinese Khrushchev" and his accomplices.

I believe rather that Liu Shao-chi was a victim of the inevitable working out of the mechanism unleashed by the Cultural Revolution. The various officials criticized, here because they were too **luke-warm** and distant from the masses, there because they were corruptors, had all been nominated for their posts by him. There was no more solidarity of Communists at the base to protect them and they could only defend themselves by attributing their faults to their superiors in the central apparatus. In addition, and whatever the facts might be, Liu Shao-chi could easily be suspected of having advised this official to distribute money so as to rally workers around him, that one to deliver a sharp rebuke to some intransigent red guards, and so on. For who else could be pulling the strings behind all these wicked actions?

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The "angry blaze" of the beginning of 1967 contributed to the growing tension in the internal atmosphere in China. The revisionist enemy seemed to have infiltrated everywhere and the vigilant masses in these conditions could not trust anyone. The red guards' cross-examination of the cadres took on more and more unpleasant forms despite the thousandfold repetition of the directive from the "Central Group for the Cultural Revolution" on the necessity to "cure the sickness rather than killing the sick man". Further, despite the devotion of the Army cadres, the administrative situation was getting more and more chaotic. Trains no longer ran to any time-table, in factories discussion was eating into the time for productive labour, in certain towns there was practically an absence of power.

Just at this moment the Chinese press published with exceptional *éclat* an essay by Mao dating from 1929: "On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party." This text might have been written the night before, so remarkably applicable was it to the circumstances in China in February 1967. Mao put his comrades on their guard against the dangers of ultra-democratism and ultra-egalitarianism, explaining very didactically that even in a perfectly fraternal society some must **com-**

mand and occupy responsible positions without the others constantly interfering with their work. Its final reminder: "Another point that should be mentioned in connection with inner-party criticism is that some comrades ignore the major issues and confine their attention to minor points when they make their criticism. They do not understand that the main task of criticism is to point out political and organizational mistakes. As to personal shortcomings, unless they are related to political and organizational mistakes, there is no need to be over-critical and to embarrass the comrades concerned. Moreover, once such criticism develops, there is the great danger that the Party members will concentrate entirely on minor faults, and everyone will become timid and overcautious and forget the Party's political tasks."

After this solemn warning from their Chairman the red guards and "revolutionary rebels" immediately relaxed their grip on the cadres. Chou En-lai even blamed them for their useless excesses and in a resounding speech reminded them that the majority of the cadres were "good and worthy to resume their places in the service of the revolution". From this point on it might have been thought that the critical phase was over and that problems concerning personalities would cease to be at the centre of debate. But in fact, it was just at this moment that the Chinese press opened fire on Liu Shao-chi, this time without any equivocation.

Neither Mao nor any other theoretician of the Cultural Revolution has devoted a serious article to the examination of the problem of the causes of bureaucratization inside the Chinese CP. They always approach this problem indirectly by denouncing the excessive concentration of power at the top of the Party and fatalistically concluding: [if this state of affairs does not change] "it will only be a short time, perhaps a few years or a decade, before a counter-revolutionary restoration will inevitably take place on a national scale, the Marxist-Leninist Party will become a revisionist Party and the whole of China will change colour".

How can this terrifying perspective be avoided? The "Central Group for the Cultural Revolution" finally gave its answer in the spring of 1967, but unfortunately it was an indirect answer once again, via a critique of a very old book by Liu Shao-chi, *Now to be a Good Communist*.

Written in 1942 at the height of the War, this pamphlet is very insistent on discipline: "A Communist must obey anything which has been adopted or decided by the majority, by a higher rank or by the Central Committee. He must even obey what he believes to be incorrect. . . . If the truth is on the side of the minority and the majority upholds what is incorrect, the minority must nevertheless obey the

majority. . . . It is essential to bow to the organization, to the majority, to a higher rank, absolutely and unconditionally."

Today, these sentences are shocking; in a China where it is the base's turn to speak, where central authority is under criticism, they are out of key. So it is easy to use Liu Shao-chi's book to show that he was preparing for his Khrushchev rôle and preaching obedience to the militants so that they should not hinder his sinister plans. Did he not produce a new popular edition of his own work in 1962? But the charge is too facile, for Liu Shao-chi's pamphlet contains no personal doctrine. It is a kind of digest of a number of centralist ideas which govern all Communist parties, it was written in Yen-an in the next cave to Mao Tse-tung and as far as we can tell with his approval. It is obvious that Liu Shao-chi has been chosen as a scapegoat for the expiation of organizational crimes, and not only those of the Chinese CP, but those of all parties of the Leninist type."

At present Liu Shao-chi's bad principles are contrasted with a sentence from Mao Tse-tung: "The question of knowing who is right and who is wrong can never be decided by the majority of votes where a fundamental principle of Marxism-Leninism is at stake." This is a fine maxim which calls on the personal freedom and responsibility of every Communist. But how is it to be translated in formal terms in the Party Statutes? So far we have no answer to this key question, even though there is at present much talk about convening a new CP congress which would transform the whole organization of the Party from top to bottom. The press is already announcing that Party members will be readmitted to their cells during public meetings, open to all workers including non-Communists. It has yet given no indication as to how higher courts of appeal will be formed to ensure internal democracy and preserve the Party from abuses of the central apparatus. The answer to these questions will be decisive for the future of the Chinese revolution and, whatever reserves may be formulated on the modalities of this crucial debate, we must give Mao credit for having raised the problem of the Party as an instrument in the service of the proletariat for the first time since Lenin.

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The Chinese CP does not propose to present itself as an original, new formation, born of the Cultural Revolution and radically different from the old "bureaucratized Party". Its propagandists have recently constructed a thesis according to which the "revolutionary left", under Mao's aegis, has always been conducting a struggle against Liu Shao-chi's "revisionist bureaucrats". In the last few months it has at last achieved a definitive victory and eliminated once and for all the enemies entrenched inside the Party, So the structural changes no

longer appear as a break with a certain conception of the Party but as a long hoped-for and carefully prepared victory.

This version runs into two difficulties: first, it makes the whole history of Chinese Communism incomprehensible; second, it presents Mao as the leader of one tendency rather than as leader of the whole Chinese CP, of which he has been Chairman for 33 years. If Peking propagandists were content to tell us that Liu Shao-chi had misinterpreted Party doctrine and given it a moderate tinge, we might perhaps be inclined to believe them, though the Party's former Number Two's reputation gave no clue to his reformist tendencies. But it is impossible to accept that the Chinese CP's two main leaders could have lived together in a permanent state of war and disagreed about everything. Anyway, a reading of the various accusations against Liu Shao-chi shows that his "crimes" of today are not the result of his past unorthodoxy, but that a transformation of this orthodoxy has made his former actions retrospectively criminal.

Thus, we are told that in 1946 Liu Shao-chi was a partisan of the parliamentary road, not of armed struggle. But as late as 1965 Mao Tse-tung repeated to André Malraux that if Chiang Kai-chek had not attacked him he would not have been the first to open hostilities.

Again, a speech that Liu Shao-chi gave to national capitalists at Tientsin in 1949 is frequently invoked. He encouraged them to collaborate with the new régime and promised them good profits, even under socialism. *Renmin Ribao* concludes: "As a result of this capitulationist line a large number of socialist undertakings were brought legally under bourgeois control. In the Shanghai commercial district more than 170 capitalists were allocated the post of manager or assistant manager in 100 large specialized companies." These facts are indisputable, but at the time the whole world admired Mao's policy towards the national capitalists, for it allowed post-revolutionary China to make the best use of all its human resources.

Finally, we are told that the "Chinese Khrushchev" put forward a damaging line as to trade unionism, for to him "the unions' work must be centred on production", not on politics. But in all Communist countries the trade unions have been precisely this sub-administration specializing in the problems of raising production by workers' emulation. China introduced the same practice in 1949 and it is necessary to feign great naivety to be shocked by it 18 years later.

Great political parties do not like making collective self-criticism: they would always prefer to shift the responsibility for their past errors onto the shoulders of a few leaders. Only thus can they successfully retain their halo of doctrinal wisdom and continue to claim infallibility. The Chinese Communists do not want to recognize that their past was tainted with the reformist efforts for which they are

now denouncing their "revisionist" opponents and which seem to them to be incompatible with their egalitarian and revolutionary claims.

Liu Shao-chi was more closely identified with the old Party line than any other leader because he had virtual charge of the executive apparatus. He was also the sponsor of the 1954 Constitution and played a crucial part in the elaboration of the country's institutional structure. So he was cut out to become the living example of everything the Party regarded as erroneous or even criminal in its own history. When he called on the masses to criticize the "Chinese Khrushchev", Mao seemed less concerned to liquidate a political rival than to impress on the new generation certain ideas which would prevent China from "changing colour".

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The cultural revolution is not the well-arranged ballet of a choreographer who has foreseen every tableau. Mao did not fear appealing to the base because he knew that his doctrine was so deeply entrenched in China that no-one would be able to challenge the regime or the Party as such. In this respect events have born him out. But the wind of change released by the base has carried away more institutions than anyone would have imagined in 1966. The base did not limit itself to examining the quality of the cadres and sorting out the "good, satisfactory, bad and execrable". Once in motion it had to turn against the management methods which made possible anomalies and abuse of authority at every level of society. In the factories it was no longer a question of replacing managers and Party secretaries by better candidates: their functions were discredited as such. Similar phenomena appeared in the universities and administration, and no doubt also in certain communes, although information on this subject is rather inadequate. "Things will never be the same again as they used to be before," said Peking students to foreign guests who visited China last summer.

So events have put the problem of institutions on the agenda, and while no-one seems ready with alternative models, the "Central Group for the Cultural Revolution" has given preference to the formula of the "triple union", with one-third of officials directly elected from the base and one-third chosen by the base from among Party cadres, more experienced in running things. The rest are to be provided by Army cadres and there do not seem to have been any difficulties with this last third.

But the multiplicity of committees at the base and the absence of any unifying nucleus formally invested by a central authority have made the designation of new officials extremely difficult. So the con-

structive period of the Cultural Revolution will prove as disturbed as the previous one, and there were even bloody clashes at Wuhan during last summer. At the moment only six provinces out of 27 have been able to elect "revolutionary committees of the triple alliance", while the others still live under provisional systems which are the centre of discussions.

The same goes for the municipal organization of the great cities, which are definitive at Peking, Shanghai and Tiensin and provisional everywhere else. Occasionally, the formation of a revolutionary municipal committee is announced in such and such a town, only to admit a few days later that the base had not recognized its authority and discussions have started up again. For all these committees should in principle take as a model the Paris Commune, during which officials were all elected and could be recalled at any moment. Also, the Chinese leadership would like to reduce permanent administrative personnel to a minimum and calls for the election of workers who are to remain in production.

The internal struggle in the factories is just as sharp. Almost everywhere, the committees at the base which emerged during the first phase of the cultural revolution are still disputing positions of responsibility, despite recent appeals from Chairman Mao in person who can see no reason why there should be a division within the working class. For the moment, some large undertakings are directly run by workers' committees drawn from the "revolutionary rebels", i.e. the most radical minority. The press tells us that they succeeded in obtaining the majority of votes. Production bonuses have been reduced to a minimum in these undertakings and the salaries of permanent staff, quite a small number anyway, are never higher than the average working wage.

But in the ~~same~~ city, sometimes only a few hundred yards from these "pilot factories", others can be found where everything is still provisional and no new form of administration has been selected. Of course, former Party secretaries have been dismissed almost everywhere, but where even a minimum of unity has not been achieved, the Army has provided temporary administrators, designated in true military style: "Comrades delegated to the first line of combat for production." The "Central Group for the Cultural Revolution" does not seem to be putting any pressure on the workers to make them choose their own officials more quickly, and it is content to repeat its priority slogan: "Make revolution and promote production." Everyday the newspapers tell us that discussion is a good thing, but only out of working hours.

In a speech at Wuhan at the end of September, Chou En-lai recognized that industrial production has suffered nonetheless through the

Cultural Revolution. He declared himself confident of the possibility of catching up on these lapses once the situation was stabilized. But paradoxically, the supply of food to the towns has remained excellent and prices in canteens or for workers' clothing have fallen during 1967.

The good harvest partly explains this Chinese economic miracle. To believe the Chinese press, it was excellent, despite the drought which struck a few areas. But to be honest, very little is known about the situation in the country. In February 1967, the Central Committee addressed a message to the peasants in which it insisted on the fact that "those comrades who have committed errors must make every effort during spring labours so as to restore themselves by worthy deeds". It urged a vast discussion, but also suggested that "dismissed cadres are forbidden to profit by it to counter-attack and seek reprisal~" The appeal says nothing about private plots but as the spirit at present abroad in China is comparable to that of the period of the Great Leap Forward, some people guess that if they are not to be suppressed, they will at least be severely reduced in size.

Schools and universities have been re-opened after more than a year's holiday for "revolutionary activity". But nothing has yet been decided as to educational reform. Intermediate examinations have been abolished since they were too favourable to students of non-proletarian origin, and many former bourgeois professors have not resumed their courses. Every day the press published resolutions and propositions from the various student groups demanding a shortening of the period of study so that they could integrate into productive life more quickly. But even here nothing has been decided and everything is still provisional.

That the Maoists are in no hurry to take the situation in hand can no doubt be explained by their unwillingness to repeat the mistake they made in 1958 with the formation of the peoples' communes. At that time, once they had approved the articles of the first commune, the Party forced the whole country to adopt this new formula immediately. But China is too big to lend itself easily to this sort of uniformity, hence probably the relative failure of the communes. At present Mao is acting with more circumspection and is waiting to see practical results from the various revolutionary committees before generalizing them.

But this is not the only reason. For the outside world, the relative inactivity of the central authority is only explicable by its weakness. In our societies, rulers are much less concerned with a definite adherence of their citizens to a specific ideology than with a much looser form of popular allegiance. For them, a common ideology is not regarded as an essential element of social efficiency. For the Chinese, on the contrary ideology is all and they feel that the activism of innumerable red

guards and revolutionary rebels is a supreme good, because in their view, this is the only way in which the masses will assimilate the thought of Chairman Mao. That is why they prefer that the "debate of a million people" should carry on for ever without coercion rather than see the masses return to their routine jobs and accept a formal discipline. Thus, paradoxically, just at the time when some foreigners did not hesitate to proclaim that "China no longer exists as a coherent unity", Mao and his friends claimed on the contrary that "the situation in China has never been so good".

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It is too early yet to weigh up the Cultural Revolution and only next year will give us a solution to the crucial problem of new Chinese institutions, including that of the Chinese CP. It is obvious that the events in that country are often affected by the peculiar character of Chinese civilization which has coloured equally its Communism, its men and their value system. Nevertheless, it would be absolutely incorrect to conclude that "The Chinese are not like us . . . they have a Communism all of their own". For beyond the national peculiarities and historical elements specific to the Chinese situation, China is dealing with a problem which is posed to the Communist movement as a whole, such as it developed during the decades of the Stalinist stranglehold.

The bureaucratic system of power, monolithic and strictly centralized, has served its time in the USSR and everywhere else. At present we know too much about its internal workings for anyone to be seduced by its claims to economic efficiency. But if this political formula is universally denounced, it still shows a remarkable resistance to change. The hope that an elevation in the standard of living will in itself open the way to a reform which is both democratic and proletarian does not seem easy to realize. The Soviet Union has found an outlet for this problem by recourse to economic mechanisms partially copied from a Western model, for it would like to give the Russian people some respite after their long years of suffering. Even though the means of production there are nationalized, this is to run the risk of producing another kind of mass-consumption society. Its choice in international policy, its dialogue with the United States, its hardly veiled annoyance with the "revolutionary impatience" of some foreign Communists and its open anger at the Chinese challenge, all this is the result of its difficult internal choices.

China has risen up radically against the mediocrity of a centralized and bureaucratized power system. It is trying to give the opposite answer to that of the Russians. It is rising up against the "economic laws" that would justify profound inequalities between men for a long time to come and would put the accumulation process at the centre of

social life. It does not agree to put off to a very distant date the transformation of the social relations in a Communist direction.

For all these reasons it has taken the only road which seemed to be open to it: a return to an extreme form of proletarian democracy, to the power of the base. No doubt the means it has chosen to induce the total politicization of the masses, to raise a process to the scale of 700 million people, are simplistic and elementary, but where and when has such an ambitious social effort and one realized on such a vast scale ever been seen?

Of course, the Chinese answer to bureaucratization would have been more convincing if their analysis had really gone to the roots of the evil. Of course, the universal value of the Cultural Revolution would have been easier to grasp if the Chinese had also made a more thorough analysis of a world situation often more complex than they are willing to admit and if they had been able to establish relations of mutual understanding with other revolutionary movements. Of course, the most serious limitation of the cultural revolution lies in the cult of personality which has made the "Little Red Book" an ambiguous instrument: it calls for the liberation of the mind through its dialectical content and solicits personal responsibility, but at the same time it nurtures a religious faith in a truth given once and for all by a man above history, Mao Tse-tung.

All these contradictions in the Cultural Revolution are disquieting: we are not dealing with a simple event containing only glowing promises for the future. But criticism can only be effective when it is based on an understanding of the real problems at issue. Nothing would be more sterile than to survey such a profound social upheaval as China's from the heights of wisdom and caution of our Western left, simply because that upheaval cannot be integrated into the Left's often schematic view of Marxist rectitude. It is so indignant at the "exaggerations" of the Chinese that it does not even take the trouble to look for the inner meaning and multiple aspects of the Cultural Revolution. But whether we like it or not, China is in the process of writing a new and perhaps decisive page of the history of Communism in our time and this involves our future too.

#### NOTES

1. "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership", June 1st, 1943, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p. 120.
2. "The United Front in Cultural Work", October 30th, 1944, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p. 237.
3. *Peking Information*, No. 49, December 4th, 1967.
4. "Introduction to a Co-operative", April 15th, 1958.

5. The word "discussion" and "debate" as used in this essay must be understood in a restricted sense. It is not intended to suggest a free-ranging and contradictory debate around clearly-stated alternatives but as an active popular participation in the interpretation of Mao's ideology. We lack an appropriate expression for such an enterprise, which, both in form and content, is unprecedented in its magnitude.
6. In fact, those Sinologists who have been lucky enough to read the first edition of Liu Shao-chi's book in the original language have found in it passages which show that the author was sceptical about democratic centralism: "Democracy and centralism are two contradictory conceptions. But this contradiction in the terms, this conceptual contradiction, accurately reflects the contradictions in objective reality. This is reflected in the contradictory structure of the Party. The system of democratic centralism within the Party reflects the contradiction between the Party members and the Party, between the lower ranks and the higher ranks, between the higher ranks and the lower ranks."

But these remarks, interpreted by Professor Franz Schurmann as indicating Liu Shao-chi's disquiet about the incompatibility of the need for discipline within the Party and on the other hand the necessity for individual initiative from all the members, do not feature in current editions of the book and for obvious reasons are never mentioned by his contemporary critics in Peking.
7. *Peking Information*, No. 9, February 27th, 1967.