

MAO'S MARXISM*

Rossana Rossanda

IN its first editorial, a year ago, *Il Manifesto* explicitly referred to the example provided by the "cultural revolution". We were then still members of the Communist Party, and in this way we showed the Party that the cultural revolution appeared to us as one of the roads that must be taken in order to regenerate not only the Party itself but also the strategy of the revolutionary movement in the West.

This declaration of ours caused a shock. The shock was due, in part, to lack of understanding: the level of information about China, even in a party which, like the Communist Party of Italy, is thought of as being an "open" one, is inexcusably low. When the conflict with the USSR broke out, no-one thought twice about accusing China of warmongering. When the cultural revolution began, *Unità* published the most disgraceful falsifications, from Japanese or Soviet sources, and the Party Secretariat spoke of an army take-over in China. Only much later did the Communist press publish some cautious attempts at interpretation.

Even today the editor of *Unità* tells comrades who ask for information that this is not available because the paper's correspondent has not been allowed into China—as if there were not a mass of information to hand, both official and semi-official, direct and irrefutable testimony on the basis of which it would be possible to try and reason out and venture a political opinion.

Of course we do not know everything. Some basic documents of the discussion that took place inside the Chinese Communist Party, including the proceedings of the last congress, have not been made public. True, the form and the vocabulary of the documents that are available often need to be interpreted, and this for two reasons: first, the specific peculiarity of an experience undergone by millions of people belonging to a civilization very different from our own, and second, our "eurocentric" (Europe-centred—Trans.) ignorance. True, also, the Chinese comrades themselves acknowledge that the priority accorded to internal problems during the cultural revolution has hindered them, so far, from "translating" this revolution; and this

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is not merely a matter of adapting the language used but of analysing the situations, the **differences** and the similarities, in a way that the Western workers' movement can grasp. Despite these reservations, however, it can be said that never since the 1920s has a socialist country given us such a large amount of material in such clear form about one of its discussions—or rather, about a fundamental political conflict in its ranks. Unlike, moreover, what happens with the so-called "public" discussions that take place in other parties, this material is presented in such a way as to bring out, in the greatest detail, the basic divergences on the Party's political line.

In reality, the extraordinary resistance opposed to the cultural revolution by many left-wing forces, both inside and outside the Communist Parties, is not due to what we do not know but to what we *do* know about it. It is hard to dismiss this revolution by saying that it is just a neo-Stalinist convulsion: very few people still try to get away with that—and, curiously enough, these are to be found among the least well-inspired of the revolution's supporters. It is equally hard to tame the dragon by classifying it, in accordance with the historicism too much in vogue in Italy, as an animal that may be able to exist in China but could not live in our climate, and saying that the cultural revolution is of no concern to us: actually the problems it raises do concern us, closely even, and there's the rub. It compels us to sharpen the struggle not merely against the class enemy but also against the infection we have contracted from the class enemy in recent decades. It compels us to ask ourselves why we go on enduring, in a state of equivocation and helplessness, the crisis in the European socialist camp and the constant putting-off of the revolution in the West. Worse still, it compels us to do this not, as some would prefer, in moral terms, by summoning ourselves to self-mortification, to a regenerative bath of revolutionary purity, but by applying ourselves to thought about fundamentals, that is, to a search, right down to the very roots, for the reasons why, even when we pursue a worthy policy, we fall back upon a tradition that we would prefer not to re-examine.

This is why the cultural revolution encounters silence, reticence, hostility—and not only in the opportunist wing of the working-class movement. Even forces that consider themselves revolutionary, such as the Cuban leadership or, in Europe, groups that are faithful to Leninism and ready to embrace China's anti-imperialist radicalism, accept neither the theory nor the practice of the cultural revolution. The latter—the coherent expression of Mao's principles, from which it cannot be separated—summons us to re-thinking and to practical activity which cannot but destroy something which is deeply rooted in the past and present of the working-class movement.

The crisis of the Soviet model

That the cultural revolution does involve this dramatic factor, this "break", is clearly to be seen if we consider when and how its ideas made their appearance on the world scene. These ideas are the themes of Maoism which have long been familiar to us: that of the "uninterrupted revolution" and that of the importance of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Two conflicts, however, brought out the destructive power of these ideas in relation to the European tradition: first, the conflict with the USSR, and then, on China's internal front, the call for mass struggle. In the fire of this dual confrontation, the choice was presented in an urgent way, even forcing the rest of the world working-class movement to take sides.

The conflict was all the keener because it occurred at a moment of crisis in the Communist movement, the time of the 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U. At the beginning, China's criticism seemed to bear essentially upon the international strategy of the Communist movement, and this criticism was distinguished from that directed at the model for building socialism which the USSR had set up for itself. The fact that the polemic about coexistence emerged *first*, and that no differences on *this* point were observed within the Chinese leadership—except as regards the implications of the discussion about army matters and on the role played by Peng Teh-huai—whereas such differences became sharply apparent in connection with criticism of the Soviet model, caused outside observers to separate these two elements from each other. In fact, what lay at the origin of the break between China and the USSR (which had been threatening for a long time) was precisely their difference of views on the model for the building of socialism, and it was from this difference of views that followed the different lines they took in international affairs—and not the other way round. Thus, the choice made between these two different lines does not merely imply a tactical appreciation of the situation, measuring the degree of internationalism: it implies a conception of the very nature of the socialist state, and thereby, of the history of European Communism over the last fifty years.

The existence of these two lines takes us back, in short, to the way in which it was thought, in 1956, that the crisis of the Stalinist societies could be analysed and solved. It is from this crisis, in fact, that everything begins. While it is absurd to see in what was proposed at the 20th Congress a possible means (which was not used) to emerge from a state of crisis, it is just as absurd (and this feature of the Chinese critique is hard to justify, and reduces the effectiveness of that critique) to see Khrushchevism as mere desire, subjective and

arbitrary, to revise and pervert a "pure and hard" socialism that needed only to keep going on as it was going already. In reality, at the beginning of the 1950s, the USSR and the entire socialist camp were having to cope with undeniable tensions in both structure and superstructure, with repeated declines or states of stagnation in production, with a never-solved agricultural problem, with generalized phenomena of bureaucratization and loss of political sense, with a divorce that was now confirmed between the people and the Party—all this being the result of the Stalinist line and the price that had to be paid for having followed it. In relation to this line the 20th Congress constituted a "change of direction" only in appearance. Not because it did not really carry out its decisions but because, even in intention, it allowed only a few modifications to be made in a social and political structure that had already begun to adopt such modifications and that was already pregnant with all the ambiguities that are obvious to us today.

I shall endeavour to deal later with this essential continuity of Khrushchevism as regards the fundamental options for the building of socialism in the USSR. For the time being it is enough to recall how the entire discussion which, from 1956 onward, developed in the Soviet and other Communist Parties was subtended by the following proposition: if there was indeed a crisis, then this must essentially consist in the superstructure lagging behind the structure and the development of the productive forces. Each Communist Party, therefore—judging in accordance with its more or less bureaucratic criteria, and taking account of its own internal stability—tried to resort to spurious corrective measures, that is to say, more precisely, forms of decentralization of economic management (but within an unchanged framework of relations and techniques of production) and forms of political liberalization (but remaining within the framework of the Stalinist state). As was seen in the subsequent years, all that resulted was an effort to swell the number of the "élites" entrusted with the management of the economy, through the development of a subjective internal dialectic (between Party and technocracy, central planning commission and "reformed" management of the enterprise, industry and agriculture), a development that was destined to reproduce and reinforce social stratifications that were still based on the production process (technicians and workers, workers and peasants, brain workers and manual workers). There also resulted the beginning of a separation of powers (soon rescinded), which aggravated the tensions in society, both latent—as between the Party and the army—and overt—as in what are referred to as the "intellectual opposition groups."

If the Stalinist system of management, when it reaches the maxi-

imum degree of tension, or paralysis, tends to resort to corrective measures of this sort—reversion to the "rationality" of economic or market processes of the capitalist type, or to "freedom" of the bourgeois variety—this is not accidental; it does not happen because the leaders have subjectively yielded to Social-Democratic temptations. Likewise, it is no accident that this society is unable to go the whole hog in reverting to capitalist forms, without the risk of disintegration. It follows that the "corrective measure" proves to be a mere oscillation, aggravating the contradictions, which eventually causes an authoritarian system to reassert itself, as the only means then available to cope with processes that can no longer be controlled. Hence the bankruptcy of Khrushchev's hypothesis as a way of re-establishing internal equilibrium. From this followed the repercussion it had on the choice of line to be taken in international affairs. The gamble consisted in trying to make the USSR strong enough to challenge the USA and to put itself forward as the new partner for the developing countries, safeguarding them against "export of counter-revolution": this gamble was risked, and even practically lost already, during the Caribbean crisis of 1962.

It is unnecessary to repeat how, from that moment onward, in Vietnam and in the Middle East, not to mention Latin America, coexistence came to mean nothing but a mere balance of strength between the Powers in their respective spheres of influence, and how all attempts at presenting coexistence as a strategy for revolution, however peaceful, were given up. It is enough to recall how these processes were sharply clarified, during the first half of the 1960s, in that "photographic developer", the Vietnam war. In 1968, with the revival of a mass anti-capitalist movement in Europe and the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the degeneration of European Communism seemed complete. At that stage, ten years after the event, it was discovered how, as far back as 1956, China had understood and criticized the fundamental sickness of the Communist movement.

This criticism had not immediately given rise to an open polemic. However, the change of direction that had at once followed it was to cause the Chinese People's Republic, seven years after its proclamation and in extremely difficult circumstances, to try to follow a line different from that of the USSR, a line of which the cultural revolution would be merely a more rigorous application. Until then, China had followed the model of development provided by the USSR: although, as Lisa Foa and Aldo Natoli¹ have reminded us, the people's war, the weight of the peasant masses, and the Yen'an experience, together with a distinctive realism, had caused corrections of method to be introduced that were not without significance. The model itself, however—the priorities of the transitional society and

the obligatory and sufficient phases it must pass through—was not questioned.

Furthermore, a number of "classical" principles were not questioned as such—or, at least, not immediately—although in practice the Chinese Communists arrived at conclusions, or started from premises, that went directly contrary to their declarations of principle. This is not surprising if we remember that the model offered by the USSR was the only one in existence, and that it was supported by accomplished facts that were not all the result of chance and many of which were not just empirical (nobody in 1917 possessed the recipe for building socialism) but were deeply rooted in the theoretical heritage of the Western workers' movement. This model could not be challenged except on the basis of differing practical experience; and the challenge, when it came, would entail consequences such that the Chinese polemic itself (though so violent against "modern revisionism" and so ready to show pride in Mao's contribution to the "Marxism of our century") does not always really bring them out. These consequences raise questions that go a long way beyond "modern revisionism", which amounts, as the Chinese speak of it, to Khrushchev's practical policies. They affect all that we bring together under the term "Marxism-Leninism" in the Soviet experience, and they send us back to Stalin, to Lenin and even to Marx.

Four points of divergence

There is no "normative" formula for building socialism: this formula is deduced from practical choices made and from the Communist movement's thinking about itself. This thinking, always strongly marked by ideologism and, moreover, gravely led astray during the years of Stalinist orthodoxy, includes areas of uncertainty and areas of utter darkness. Some "facts" which are regarded as established for certain, and the accuracy of which therefore does not need to be proved, have influenced the entire building process. The cultural revolution (itself also strongly marked by ideologism) has for the first time denounced these "facts" and exposed their dubious character, not without making abrupt reversals and contradictory statements regarding continuity. This is why it is hard to decide (especially if we are to avoid being schematic) just what the fundamental divergences are. It seems to me, however, that one can determine the main lines of divergence on the basis of four questions of major importance: the problem of transforming the structure, that of building the material foundations of socialism, that of priority for building the material foundations as compared with building the superstructure, that of the political and social agent of this transformation. These are, of course, four aspects of the same problem.

A. Structure and superstructure

The first question concerns the transformation of the structure. In the practical work of the Communist movement it has come to be supposed—true, without checking this point in the “classics”—that after the revolutionary breakthrough, that is, after the taking of power and the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, transformation of the structural basis would be practically guaranteed. Subsequent development of the transitional society would take place essentially at the superstructural level.

We find this idea reappearing in some statements made in connection with the cultural revolution. It is also expressed by a writer like Joan Robinson, who can nevertheless not be accused of over-simplifying matters. Identifying capitalism with “*personal property in the means of production, which yields rentier income and gives private enterprise control over economic development*”, and considering, correctly, that this kind of personal ownership does not exist in the USSR, Joan Robinson has then to defend “the Chinese view that Russian experience shows that a capitalist-type superstructure can grow up on a socialist base.” She does this by referring to the well-known passage in Marx’s *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy* in which the autonomy of the superstructure is recognized, and by paraphrasing Mao on the “*action in reverse . . . the reaction of consciousness upon social existence?*” “Once,” she writes, “the view that ideas arise out of material circumstances has been accepted, there is no sense in denying that causation runs both ways.”²

The crisis of Soviet society is thus essentially reduced to a disharmony between the socialist basis and the political superstructure. This is more or less identical with the analysis currently made by the Communist Parties since the 20th Congress. What follows from it is, for those on the Right, the need to find a solution by liberalizing institutions, and, for those on the Left, the need to stimulate devotion, disinterestedness, the spirit of sacrifice and egalitarianism as a life-style. Revisionism and cultural revolution are both relegated to the sphere of consciousness.

How far, though, can we say that the structure and the superstructure are separate? And, above all, on what do we base ourselves when we take it for granted that the revolutionizing of the structure has been accomplished? It is not possible, in the context of these notes, to examine in detail how this problem figured in the discussion on the nature of the socialist state after October 1917. What is certain is that neither in Lenin’s thought nor in the discussion that followed his death do we find the “structure” reduced so calmly to “private ownership of the means of production.” What prevented Lenin from over-

estimating the results achieved in relation to the structure was that he was deeply aware of the limitations which verticalization and bureaucracy imposed upon the Soviet power, and in the subsequent discussion the need was admitted to operate through economic instruments and mechanisms, including the market, the price system, etc., the nature of which remained ambiguous. It would seem accurate to say that in the Leninist phase, the shortcomings in the transformation of the structure were ascribed, in the main, to the survival, even after the taking of power, of the former relations, essentially property relations (and in the first place, peasant ownership), which had not yet been socialized.

Under Stalin, the entire theory of the class struggle was based on the assumption that, as the revolution advances, the "former" social strata and groups put up an ever more vigorous resistance; to such a degree that he deduced from this, in his address on the draft constitution in 1936, that the structural base for socialism was now ensured by the disappearance of these strata, and the phase of proletarian dictatorship that followed 1917 could be seen as completed. In Stalin's notes in 1952 on the economic problems of socialism in the USSR this idea is still present, the contradictions of the transition stage being attributed to the *ageing* of the production-relations inaugurated after the seizure of power.³ While, then, the development of society still presents contradictions, these no longer bear the character of *class* antagonism. When, some years later Khrushchev was to speak of a "state of the whole people", though he would be going much farther than Stalin, it was along the same line of reasoning.

If, however, we examine the documents of the cultural revolution, the question does not seem as simple as that. On the one hand, the "ideological" factor is strongly stressed, and that tends to present the struggle in progress as a revolution in the superstructure; but, on the other, it is claimed, again and again, that the enemy to be fought is not an *ideology* but "capitalism, already restored in the USSR, or the "capitalist road" advocated in China by Liu Shao-chi. Must we deduce—that the expression "cavitalism" is being used in the broad sense of a system of ideas, attitudes and relations between men, *even regardless of the structural basis, the production-relation?* This is what the less violent of the Communist critics in China have chosen to claim, not without acrimony, seeing in it a violation or an incorrect use of the terminology and conceptual system of Marxism. This is also done, with satisfaction, by some supporters of the cultural revolution who see, in this tendency to dissolve the capitalist mode of production into a system of relations of power and authority among persons, not co-ordinated with the material basis, a "surpassing" of Marx and a certain link between Mao and a variety of modern sociology. In short, it is *Mao versus Marx*.

My interpretation is a radically different one. It seems to me that the Chinese revolution, in a perfectly Marxist way, raises afresh in all its complexity the problem of the *structure*, and so of the objective basis upon which the fate of the transitional society is determined. In order to do this, the Chinese revolution rejects the dichotomy that underlies both the Stalinist formula and what may be called the "revisionist" one, of the relation between structure and superstructure, regarded as two different planes which condition each other. This is a conception which leads to reducing the problem of the "structure" to that of the ownership of the means of production.

That this reduction, which is so commonly accepted, is arbitrary, is shown by the often-quoted passage in *Marx* which reads: "In the social production of their existence, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production that correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. *The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society*—⁴ that is to say, the foundation on which rises a political and legal superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness." From this most classical passage we deduce neither an *autonomy*, in the revisionist sense, nor a *subordination*, in the Stalinist sense, of the superstructure, but, on the contrary, its specific co-presence with the structure, a projection and form of the production-relations as society's "awareness of itself." In addition, however, we deduce from it something that provides the leading thread for all Marxist research, namely, the concept of the structure as an organic and complex formation and as a "sum total of relations", that is, of relations between men, the pivot of which is the labour-relation within the framework of material production, a system which is *also* expressed (without being reducible to this) in the form assumed by property. (See also the passage on property in the Introduction of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.)

This does not mean that private ownership of the means of production is a secondary factor. It is the product and expression of the capitalist mode of production, its characteristic mark, the end-point of the long process of alienating human labour. But it is in the totality of conditions (development of the productive forces, division of labour, loss and recovery of "individuality", assertion of the self, negation and negation of the negation in relations between man and nature, man and his instruments of production, man and man) that the highest form of the alienation of labour, the capitalist mode of production, is determined. This mode of production sets so deep a mark on all the material and social conditions that constitute it that, in a certain way, it congeals them and gives them the appearance of permanence, even

when their internal contradictions explode and private ownership of the means of production, private accumulation and private exploitation of labour cease to be possible.

This connexion between the *different* elements that go to make up a form of production is so close that it is impossible to imagine a break, a real crisis of the capitalist mode of production, that would not be a *total upheaval*—and not merely the termination of one of the conditions of this mode of production. In other words, capitalism does not die unless that process is fully completed which is described in the well-known passage in the *Grundrisse* entitled: "Pre-capitalist economic formations," but which actually sketches in outline the whole of human development—that is, until man *realises* a total *reappropriation* of his social being at the level to which the capitalist mode of production has raised human labour: before that level is attained, man cannot win back his freedom and individuality, this being possible only under an advanced and complex form of social and productive organization; but in a *total* form, since the purpose of the upheaval is precisely this reappropriation, this new "common" quality of social being.

This is why Marx does not speak of "public" but of "common" ownership. We can indeed conceive (as has been the case up to now in Communist revolutions) that, despite the abolition, immediate in industry and gradual in agriculture, of every kind of "private" ownership, the function fulfilled by the *non-common* ownership of the means of production in the production-relation remains practically the same as before, together with the mechanism, if not the purpose, of accumulation. We can conceive, in short, survival of the selling of labour-power, with its alienating effects, perpetuation of the social division of labour, etc.—that what has been introduced is not a radical upheaval *within the production-relation itself* but one merely outside and beyond it, through a different, no longer private, distribution of the product of labour. But we can never mistake this new mode of distribution for the process of reappropriation described by Marx.

If this is so, the taking of power and the abolition of private ownership of the means of production are only the condition, necessary but not sufficient, for transforming the structure in the direction of socialism. Necessary, since without these changes the further upheaval could not be accomplished, but not sufficient, because these changes do not fully accomplish that upheaval. It follows that what is called the "transitional" society is a society in which a great deal of the capitalist mode of production survives, *not as a vestige of the past but as an intrinsic form of the present*; a society in which inequality among men continues to be based on material possession of the instruments of

production (possession which is not *legal* but *managerial*) and on the persistence of the selling of one's labour-power as the sole means of livelihood.

This is the point touched by the cultural revolution. It seems to me that in this connexion we should take what it says quite literally, namely, that it is waging what is still an anti-capitalist struggle, the aim of which is to bring about a revolution *of the structure and in the structure*. I think we should take literally the definition it gives of what has to be overcome: "bourgeois relations" which are not at all "ideological" relations, empty projections of material forms that no longer exist, but projections of material relations that are still concrete and fully real.

It is in this sense, I think, that—as always happens in the fire of social conflict—the cultural revolution undeniably takes a step forward as compared with those writings of Mao's that are regarded as classics on the theme of the class struggle in the transitional society: the "Essay on contradiction" (1937) and "On correctly solving contradictions among the people" (1957). The former is indeed heavily tinged with Hegelianism. (Not without reason has it become the work to which refer those pro-Chinese interpreters of Mao who emphasise precisely the "Mao versus Marx" aspect.) In the latter, a more complex work, Mao still distinguishes between contradictions "with the enemy" and contradictions "among the people", the first being antagonistic and the second not, which can allow of a purely anti-Stalinist interpretation, as occurred in the polemic that followed 1956.⁵ Going farther than this, however, the cultural revolution reveals the material (and therefore antagonistic) roots of contradiction, calls them by their name—capitalism—and bases upon this fact the class struggle and the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Proof of this is provided by, *inter alia*, the discussion on dialectics which began in 1964, in connection with the definition of dialectics given by Yang Hsien-chen and known by the two formulae: "One divides into two" and "Two rejoin into one." The controversy, on how to combat a gradualist and evolutionary conception (the "conciliationist" conception of Yang Hsien-chen) with an antagonistic conception of contradiction, was based on the fact that every contradiction expresses not an equilibrium between positions each of which is imperfect in itself, but a moment of inexorable antagonism, a driving force of the historical process in so far as it cannot find any solution elsewhere than *outside* the terms in which the contradiction presents itself.

But what determines the *inexorable* character of one of the terms of the contradiction if not the fact that it is rooted in a material reality which a purely ideological synthesis cannot solve? In a more

easily comprehensible way than in Mao's theoretical writings, as Blumer observes very rightly,⁶ the popular documents of the cultural revolution, which tell how Mao's thought enables men to overcome a wide variety of practical difficulties (documents that are the target for mockery by Western critics), enable us to grasp the material nature of the "principal contradiction", which is opposed by a revolutionary awareness born of needs that are also material. In short, what we have here is a Hegelian dialectic with its feet on the ground.

Thus the cultural revolution raises anew, in all its magnitude, the problem of overthrowing the capitalist mode of production. It does away with the false contrast in the current formula of "structure and superstructure." It re-evaluates the implications of a political revolution that has not continued into a world-wide social revolution. In short, it takes up the whole of the Marxist thematic of the total overturn that socialism means. It thus sees in the transitional society the field for a new phase of the class struggle, in the fullest sense of that expression.

B. *The model for accumulation*

The second aspect of the model for the building of socialism that has been brought under discussion is the problem of accumulation. Up to now, political power has been taken only in backward countries. From this it has been deduced, logically enough, that the transition to socialism and, *a fortiori*, to communism, implied rapid building of the *material foundations* of development, conceived both as a guarantee for the survival of the revolution and as military defence against foreign aggression. The driving force of this "accumulation" was, in the USSR, the process of industrialisation, and, within this, the priority assigned to heavy industry. The bulk of investment was poured into the industrial sector, equipping part of the labour force (the already existing proletariat and the working class in the course of being formed) with instruments and means of labour which were largely paid for through a "levy" extracted from agricultural accumulation.

We find the historical reasons why this choice was made in the discussion that followed the Leninist phase in the USSR in the 1920s.⁷ Even today, as Bettelheim points out, and as emerges, moreover, from the discussions in the CPSU (from Khrushchev's to-ing and fro-ing to the recent declarations by Brezhnev), the chasm that this choice dug between industry and agriculture has not been closed up. Fifty years after October, the contradiction between town and country certainly seems unsolved, nor can a moment of productive unification between industry and agriculture be foreseen, such as Khrushchev openly said he

hoped for. The rates of growth of the two branches continue to differ. The peasants' conditions are worse than those of the workers. Society is still divided, and in the industrial sector the distinction between manual and intellectual labour is increasingly emphasized. The wage-scale and vocational training (that is, the educational system) reflect a division of labour that is not merely technical but social. The passage from Stalinism to Khrushchevism brought about no substantial change in the model from this point of view, except, perhaps, that Khrushchevism seems to have legitimized and consolidated a system that, under Stalinism, could still be seen as something transitory.

The internal opposition and the Communist critics (official, as in the Italian C.P., or dissident, as in France) are alike in not challenging this model and in attributing all shortcomings to the "backwardness" of Soviet society. They even take this idea to extremes. At the origin of this position of theirs we find an undialectical interpretation of what Marx says about the relation between "historical growth" and "revolution", and in particular his view that man frees and recovers himself through an overturn carried out at the highest point of development of the capitalist mode of production—in so far as it is only in the latter that the collective character of production makes itself evident.

By interpreting Marx in this way a separation is introduced into the capitalist mode of production between a *form* (historical and social, subject to political variations relating precisely to ownership of the means of production and property-relations in general) and a "kernel" not subject to variations of a social kind but only to linear growth, and which is said to present the features assumed by the productive forces as a result of the development of machine-industry—the latter being regarded as altogether a positive acquisition, not contaminated by history—and therefore to be preserved: from this comes the doctrine of the neutrality of science and technique **and** even their quality of things "good in themselves."

This is the source of the conviction that socialism can be built only in accordance with a technique-and-production model similar to that of the "industrial revolution"—in every respect save "human relations", the ownership of the means of labour and the social distribution of the product. From this follows the acceptance of that "competitiveness" to which one can aspire only if one takes as one's model the most advanced capitalist societies. In this respect there is no essential difference between the Soviet point of view and that of the European socialist opposition or that of the leaders of Cuba or other developing countries. (The decision that Cuba has made to concentrate its efforts on producing sugar should not deceive us. Cuba offers no new model for industrialization or socialist accumulation. Sugar is

not a "peasant" product, it is Cuba's "heavy industry", for it is produced in industrial fashion, even though this production takes place partly in the countryside.)

It is China that has rejected this model, first in practice and then, with the cultural revolution, in principle. The reason why Mao broke with it is plain, namely, the certainty that this model entails renewal *ad infinitum* of the capitalist division of labour, an increase in the gap between town and country, between vanguard sectors of production and backward sectors, a privileged position for technique and intellectual labour in comparison with manual labour. Thus, this model expresses and perpetuates, even within a production-process that has henceforth become collective, and in which everyone participates, a mystificatory idea of labour: the principle "to each according to the work he has done" implies the deep ambiguity of the capitalist "yardstick" by which the value of labour is measured.

At the same time, by allowing zones of uneven development to develop in society, the social roots of inequality are reinforced, and in this way the feature of capitalism that this model reproduces is not, as is alleged, its "rationality", but its squandering and destruction of a huge potential of productive power. This last point often escapes the notice even of many supporters of the cultural revolution who approve in good faith the positive character of an "ideological" revolution that they nevertheless see as sacrificing the economic rationality, efficiency and "realism" which they regard as so many positive values of the capitalist mode of production.

This, however, is where the Maoist criticism of the traditional model of socialist development begins. In his speech of 1956 (published in *II Manifesto* of May 1970), Mao denounces the irrational and inefficient nature of a type of growth that proceeds through the development of privileged sectors. "Of course," he says, "it is necessary to give industry priority; but if we really want to develop industry we must develop agriculture. Of course we must give priority to heavy industry, but if we really want to develop heavy industry we must develop light industry, etc." This is not a mere rhetorical trick intended to cast doubt, without seeming to do so, upon preferential selection in economic development. It is a demonstration of the *irrationality* that the priorities chosen by the Soviet accumulation model (itself reproducing the "technical objectivities" of capitalism) mean for the under-developed countries. The cultural revolution had the task of taking this criticism to the root of the matter, by advancing the slogan: "We must walk on our own feet." Already earlier, however, through the commune system and the Great Leap Forward, Mao had tried, not without some dangerous overhastiness (mistakes that were later admitted) to close up the gap between industry and

agriculture, *to use to the full all the productive forces, each at its highest level, but without any of them being allowed to harm the others.*

It is not possible, within the limits of this article, to investigate the origins of this political line. True, in his rejection of the subject of the Soviet accumulation model based on an "agricultural levy", Mao took into account the special conditions of China and the weight of the peasant masses, the protagonists of the revolution. But this explanation does not seem adequate. It could have led Mao to make the *opposite* choice, the traditional peasant choice, in favour of encouraging the formation of small property units. This is the choice that seems to be the one normally made in the "Soviet" model when the tensions caused by the phases of forced collectivisation have to be remedied. Mao rejects this path. He stands in opposition to the Bukharin line of "advancing at a snail's pace." He aims at a theoretical and practical unification of the process of "proletarianization" in China. For this reason he will never abandon the doctrine of *proletarian* leadership of the revolution. Instead of emphasizing the specificity of the peasant problem, he tries to solve it by an uninterrupted sharpening of the class struggle in the countryside, an implacable fight against private ownership, through the bold attempt at industrial-agricultural management by the communes. His effort to bring about an immense social recasting of the population, poured back from the towns into the countryside, is only the sociological aspect of the matter. Before all that, and embodied in it, is the idea of securing an all-round development which, by making the whole of society go forward together, destroys at the very roots the social inequality resulting from a certain conception of growth based on according priority to certain sectors and on the division of labour.

From this follows the denunciation of "bourgeois" technique, science, culture and education, whose lack of neutrality Mao exposes, revealing their "original sin", their purpose of reproducing and concealing uneven development, but also, and very forcibly, the limitations and wastage that they entail.

A superficial interpretation of the cultural revolution may satisfy the aspirations of a European "revolutionary" aristocracy, but no trace of these aspirations is to be found in Mao's writings in the documents of the cultural revolution. The incidents reported by Chinese sources in which we learn how some group of workers have succeeded in making oxygen bottles although the technicians could not do this, or how some village has succeeded in combating the marching caterpillars that infested the nearby forests "by launching parasitic wasps against them", have upset people in the west because they denounce the "objectivity of knowledge", which we regard as sacred. What

really emerges, though, from events of this sort is not the exaltation of common sense above science, but rather *the different use made of technique, and so its changing, due to the fact that a different social use is being made of it.*

Here, too, Mao's dialectic—pace his detractors, and also far too many of his friends—is strictly Marxist. While it is true that Marx regarded capitalism as the crown of man's pre-history, and socialism as its offspring, it is equally true that for Marx this direct descent of socialism from capitalism is to be ensured by a destructive birth-process, an upheaval from which nothing is immune, apart from the technical level at which it occurs. Lenin, when he speaks of continuity and break, in connection with the inheritance of bourgeois culture, the "heritage", does this with equally-placed emphasis (so that he can be made to say whatever one likes, by taking isolated quotations, and, naturally, the Communist parties, especially the Soviet party, stress what he says about continuity). Mao and the cultural revolution see the obstetric role of destruction, upheaval, "*Umwälzung*", as creating a new order and a genuine rationality.

This conception is much closer to Marx's, when he wrote in *The German Ideology*: "In all revolutions up till now the mode of activity always remained unscathed and it was only a question of a different distribution of this activity . . . whereas the communist revolution is directed against the hitherto prevailing *mode* of activity . . ." And in the *Grundrisse*: "In fact, however, when the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth, if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc., of individuals, produced in universal exchange? What if not the full development of human control over the forces of nature? . . . What, if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions, without any pre-conditions other than antecedent historical evolution? . . . In bourgeois political economy, and in the epoch of production to which it corresponds, this complete elaboration of what lies within man appears as the total alienation and the destruction of all fixed, one-sided purposes, as sacrifice of the end in itself to a wholly external compulsion."¹⁶

C. Economic and political "priorities"

This *destructive* element as the condition for liberating, "releasing" "Man's nature" is what gives profound meaning to revolutionary action, and it cannot be separated from "building the material foundations" of socialism. This is the third point on which Mao rejects the traditional model and the order of priorities that it recommends, namely, first of all to lay the material foundations and then to proceed to "superstructural" changes, that is, to destruction of the former

relations between men, to "real" socialism, the "transition to communism" and the abolition of the state.

In socialist construction of the Soviet type one holds fast to these distinctions, because of the type of development chosen. Accelerated growth of industry according to a model conceived so as to make possible competition with capitalist growth means that leadership must not merely be "all-embracing" but also extremely vertical in character, because it imposes certain choices, just as the development of a technique of the capitalist type means a hierarchical division of labour, a form of selection, a form of preparation for "social roles" which is at once hierarchical and fragmented. Finally, it leads, almost inevitably (I say "almost" because the Cuban endeavour has taken a different line) to the choice of a promotion system (with social or material incentives) that aggravates the stratification of society. Thus, even within a society that considers itself socialist, the division of labour and separation of roles becomes established, and, along with it, a plurality not merely of functions but of actual *authorities*. And this hierarchy is so deeply marked in the conditions of labour, in the "production-relations," that even if there is talk of a "state of the entire people" or the "end of the dictatorship of the proletariat", the facts rise up to refute it: meaning by the facts, the intensification of the vertical, repressive character of the state, and the permanent delegation of ever greater powers to whoever represents the state.

Here too the problem that the cultural revolution has tackled is a complex one, and its solution apparently paradoxical. It is not possible to do away with inequality—and Mao saw this when he chose the system of communes—without destroying its material roots. Hence the choice of a model of material development which is *different*, being based on an acceleration and at the same time an intermingling of the productive forces. But the condition for this fundamental transformation is a change in the relations between men, and not the other way round. Priority is given to the subjective, revolutionary choice, though this may go contrary to the natural tendencies of development. This is what is expressed in the slogan: "Politics in command."

"Both for the development on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself (the transformation of society), men have to be changed on a mass scale, something that can happen only in practical movement, *a revolution*. This revolution is needed, therefore, ~~not~~ only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way but also because only in a revolution can the class *overthrowing* it succeed in ridding itself of the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew". In Mao, as in this passage from *Marx [The German Ideology*

—Trans.], the priority of politics is not a matter of consciousness. It is the stressing of practice as the only factor of destruction (of the enemy, and also of what has entered into ourselves from the enemy) and of construction of a new order.

But—and here too the cultural revolution seems to me to have been misunderstood—this practice is not aimed at bringing about "ideological" changes, it is not educative or rhetorical: it is applied so as to achieve material changes, real changes in the objective relationship between labour and authority. Hence the refusal to separate the two moments (building of the material foundations, then, later, establishment of the superstructure), which obviously leads to a more correct view of the relation between structure and superstructure, understood as being indissoluble and not as two levels, one above the other. Hence the rejection of economism, represented by Liu Shao-chi, or an essentially technological conception of defence, personified by Peng Teh-huai, and an effort to challenge hierarchy in a fundamental way—an effort needed in order to establish a different system of productive and material development. By "priority to politics" we are not to understand "priority given to good feelings over practical reality."¹⁰ In "politics" and "economics" Mao symbolically distinguishes two factors which, in practice, he constantly strives to fuse together, in a Marxist way, by denying the independent existence and alleged objectivity of a meta-historical economics, separated from the social context, and restoring to *politics* its nature as the agent transforming the structure.

This is why the cultural revolution, as a mass phenomenon, started from the university, seen as the focus of selection and reproduction of hierarchical and inegalitarian society. It attacked the system of education that perpetuates the division of labour inherited from the capitalist mode of production and capitalist technique. Some months later, during the Shanghai experience, the cultural revolution was to tackle directly the organization of labour in the enterprises. Ranks had already been abolished in the army; during the 1960s all urban workers and students had to go and work in the communes, and administrators and leading personnel all had to perform a certain amount of manual labour. In the thrust exerted by the "cultural revolution" (still, essentially, on the plane of education and consciousness), there is an element of "breaking", for it calls in question not merely the way functions are distributed but the very functions themselves. It is no longer merely the social composition of the university's membership that is criticized, but the very nature of the university. It is no longer the number of hours that the manager must spend working at a machine that is in question (though experience has proved that, without permanent social pressure, he would spend very few

hours there), but the entire way the enterprise is run, and the fragmentation of labour in the enterprise. It is no longer a matter of discussing how to "democratize" the vertical way that leadership is exercised in the state, the economy, the enterprise or the educational institutions—the very nature of these things is under discussion. The principle: "Politics in command" aims at changing radically, without any pre-condition other than the state of historical development, the totality of relations between men. This is what has come to be called, perhaps wrongly, the introduction of elements of communism before the communist phase has been attained. More correctly, it is a refusal to bow to any objectivity but that of the growth of the revolution.

D. Proletariat and party.

Finally, this choice of a different model assumes different relations between the Party and the masses and a different conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is generally admitted that in the European models of socialist construction these relations "set hard" fairly soon, so that what was called dictatorship of the proletariat assumed the form of a political dictatorship exercised by the vanguard on behalf of the proletariat. Discussion begins, if it begins at all, when we try to discover *why* this relationship became congealed: to what extent this was due to the "immaturity" of the revolution, which obliged the vanguard to fulfil a centralized and authoritarian function, and, finally, to what extent this centralization went further than it had intended. It is certain that, given the conditions in which the October revolution took place (all the difficulties of Lenin's last years, the vicissitudes of the soviets, and, finally, the rapid "crisis of unity" of the Soviet leading group all testify to this), the Party came to take over the whole sphere of management and even of *the political factor*, establishing a relationship with the masses which was one of *profound* consensus during "quiet times", but without either receiving any delegation of power from them or giving power back to them, and above all without being subject to any control beyond what was secured by internal discussion, even this being dropped during the Stalin phase.

The type of material transformation that it was sought to bring about in Soviet society, the transition from War Communism to the N.E.P., from the N.E.P. to industrialization and then to collectivization of agriculture, undoubtedly intensified the authoritarian nature of the relationship between the Party and the masses.

Let us come back to the most obvious expression of this relation—the levies laid upon the peasantry in order to affect accumulation could be exacted only by coercion, in applying which it was not possible

to observe any clear discrimination on class lines. For what was involved was not merely a bitter fight against private ownership in agriculture, as in China, but also the general subordination of agriculture as a whole to the aims of industrial accumulation. And we have already seen the consequences that acceptance of productive organization in the form that it has historically evolved in machine industry must entail so far as power-relations among men are concerned. This way of organizing production could not but be reflected (though on different planes) in the verticality of political leadership, and that risked bringing about tension between two equally vertical structures, namely, that of the economy and that of the Party (a tension that has moreover, provided one of the subjects to the recent [Soviet—Trans.] discussions about the "reforms").

The choice made by Mao after 1957, which constitutes his answer to the crisis of Stalinist society, consistently follows the line of reopening the relation between the Party and the masses. For him, however, this reopening needs to be accomplished not so much through internal democratization of the Party as through a definite shift in real power. The launching of the communes (organs that are simultaneously units of production, administration and political activity) is an attempt to achieve, by speeding up the process of unifying the social status of the workers and the peasants, an all-round redistribution of power within society.

The choice made by the cultural revolution is even more radical still, in that the *base* of society is to become the protagonist of political struggle. "In the great proletarian cultural revolution, the masses can liberate themselves only by their own efforts, and it is not for anyone to usurp the place of the masses in this action" states Point 4 of the Central Committee decision of August 1966, which signaled the victory of Mao's tendency. Finally, this phase of the cultural revolution culminated in a congress which was also a new constituent assembly of the Party, with delegates appointed by open, mass meetings, so that, in the course of the cultural revolution, the cadres, structures and personnel of the Party were first reduced to nothing and then reconstituted, this time as a vanguard sprung from the very fire of the struggle.

But what lay at the origin of this choice of line? An interpretation of Mao in accordance with the "theory of spontaneity" (in the sense nowadays given to this word) is as little justified as that made by the Maoist groups in Europe who overlook Mao's recourse to the masses and stress only the reconstruction of the revolutionary party. Actually, the recourse to the masses is the distinctive, essential feature of the cultural revolution. It constitutes the basic difference between this revolution and the previous phases of Mao's political battle, including

the experiment with the communes, the "rectification" campaign and the campaign for socialist education, which were all settled within the Party.

When he decided to carry the struggle outside the Party, when he took his stand on 5 August 1966, launching the slogans: "Rebel!" and "Fire on the Headquarters!" Mao well knew that this decision would radically alter the place of the Party in society, whatever might be the outcome of the battle, in the sense that, even if the Party were to be left with the responsibility of synthesis and leadership (a theme on which the "Little Red Book" dwells, and with which it even begins), it would be denied the right to find its legitimacy within itself, exist as a political world independent of society, and be its own master. When the masses were summoned not merely to sit in judgment on the Party but to fight against it, Mao gave back to society its role as political subject. He made the Party once more an "instrument" of the proletariat, no longer an entity that was in certain respects external to the proletariat. He clearly reaffirmed the existence and importance of a dialectic between the masses and their political representatives, a dialectic in which the masses are the essential element.

In this case too the operation carried through is fundamentally Marxist, and I think it is not accidental that the theme of the Commune has been raised again during the cultural revolution. It is Marxist because it presumes a *permanent material recasting of political consciousness*. Why is it that the cultural revolution process cannot be accomplished within the Party? Clearly because the Party, in its structure and its consciousness of itself, shows the effects of the role that was assigned to it historically in the Soviet model of socialist construction. This was the reproach aimed at Liu Shao-chi, who was attacked for his gradualist conception of the development of the class struggle *and* for his authoritarian conception of the Party, the effect of both being to "put brackets round" the same partner in the social dialogue, namely, the proletariat as protagonist of the class struggle.

Contrary to Liu's doctrine, the reasons for a further phase of social upheaval can be put forward only by the social agent directly interested in this upheaval. Not that the poor peasant is the purest and least corrupted element in society, but, because he is the most deprived (the proletarian, the one "without means of production"¹⁰), he is also the *reliable* social agent. For him it is indeed enough to see himself in his actual conditions to take up his correct political position." The entire cultural revolution, at least as Mao sees it (for others were ready to accept a sort of "cultural revolution" under the direction of the Party, that is, under its control), thus tends to highlight the real contradictions in society and those who personify **them**,

denounce those who try to hide them, and everything that even in the minds of the people themselves, has the effect of blurring these contradictions.

To me—and here I oppose all the "idealizing" interpretations—the material basis of Mao's decision seems obvious. Mao is setting right-way-up, feet on the ground, the dialectic between the Party and the masses, between the vanguard and the base. A more complicated problem then arises. Mao's approach tends to brush aside the argument about the "immaturity" of the revolution (even the consciousness of the exploited is alleged not to be "ripe"), that argument from which the need has always been deduced for a vanguard outside the proletariat. Mao does away with this vanguard, or at least finds it elsewhere, since he sees in the dispossessed, when conscious of their dispossessed or exploited condition, and regardless of the level of development of the productive forces, the objectively antagonistic element, the protagonist of the revolution. And it is from this fact that he wants to cause the whole process of social development to follow: not, as has been said, just so as to prevent society from splitting into advanced sectors and backward ones, but because only the backward sector enables the advanced one to appreciate completely its own mechanism and function, in the same way that only the advanced sector can take charge of the mechanism of the backward sector which has not enjoyed the benefits of development.

Are not the connection between this and China's international policy, and also the difference between Mao's internationalism and the "Third World" ideology, quite obvious here? By grasping what the "unitary" character of the capitalist process consists in during the imperialist phase, Mao departs from **Marx's** view that capitalism unites the world by making it homogeneous: instead, imperialism unifies the world by creating and maintaining under-development, an absence of homogeneity. This lack of homogeneity between countries is thus no longer seen as merely due to some parts of the world lagging behind others. It is not something existing as such "before" world-wide capitalist accumulation and "outside" it, but a direct constituent of this capitalist accumulation. A proletarianizing process has taken place on the world scale, and in huge areas of the world antagonistic tensions are getting more and more acute. Now at last, however, the fronts are linking up into a single struggle in which "the countrysides" are no longer poor misfits standing in need of a factor of growth, mediation, transition to the bourgeois-democratic phase, but are now seen as the expression of the world proletariat. There is no longer any part of the world that is "not ripe" for the revolution, and no proletariat, urban or rural, can be excluded

from it. It is not only necessary but possible to carry out a revolution based upon the masses.

On Marx's line

The cultural revolution thus breaks with certain fundamental assumptions that have dominated the construction of the transitional societies in Europe. On one point essentially: the need for a radical rejection, a ceaseless re-examination of the elements of historical continuity that the capitalist epoch hands on to subsequent epochs. In short, the innovation here is that the revolution is seen not as a new way of managing a society which has been inherited, but as an act of destruction followed by a new condition of social being. What is involved is a decision that is not merely political but also theoretical. What, then, is Mao's place in the tradition of the Communist movement? Where does he link up, or where is the break in continuity?

This question is not an historical one, though a detailed study of how Mao Tse-tung's thought has been formed still needs to be undertaken. It is a political question. And in Europe, the supporters of various Maoist tendencies give different replies to it. The one that is claimed to be most "official" suppresses the problem, so to speak, by hailing Maoism as "Stalinism restored"—which, in its turn, is said to be nothing but "true Leninism". To be able to say this it is necessary to wipe out, in an almost superhuman effort, a whole series of facts, not only theoretical but historical; and this is done by some Marxist-Leninists who feel a desperate need to reduce the crisis of the working-class movement in the West to "mere betrayal", and so to find a ready-made solution to the problem—and return to the alleged revolutionary integrity of the Communist Parties as they were when they were developing under the guidance of the Third International. The fact that it was in that period that the bankruptcy of the revolution in the West was consummated is of little interest to them. What they need is to avoid the task of seeking out the real reasons for the delay in the revolution in the West and of coming to grips with the complexity of a phase of history and a socio-political formation for which the appropriate strategy has still to be found. What matters to them, therefore, is to find a short cut and at the same time to provide themselves with a guarantee: the victorious existence of People's China.

The "Third World" tendency (now in retreat, incidentally), expresses a similar uncertainty. Mao, it is said, is the theoretician of the revolution of the poor. China is not much different from Cuba or the other Afro-Asian countries, the ultimate hope of the world. The problem of the revolution is shifted towards the backward areas to

which the (shameful and accursed) West owes merely courageous and desperate solidarity.

However different these two positions, they have something in common, which, curiously enough, they share with the Communist Parties. This is that they try to detach the Chinese experience from a very present reality, in order to push it away, either in time, as a mere repetition of something that has happened already, or in space, as the truth of a world different from ours. The cultural revolution is supposed not to exist as an innovating and living contribution to the theory of the working-class movement and the history of our time.

There is another, third interpretation, of more recent origin. This is the one put forward by groups and individual specialists who appeal to Maoism and stress its radically innovating aspect. Not only is the Chinese experience said to be different, as indeed it is, from the Stalinist experience—the latter is alleged to be, in reality, the historical result not only of Leninism but also of Marxism, the inevitable outcome of a linear development of "eurocentric" Marxism, which could not have avoided landing up in this dead end. Marx, they say, seeing capitalism as the crowning achievement of history, conceived the revolution as a mere breaking of the fetters that hindered the development of the productive forces, fetters that actually amount to only one fetter: private ownership of the means of production, seen as the cause of fragmentation, anarchy and waste in production. Socialism is thus, according to this conception, nothing more than the establishment of a framework in which the productive forces, at the level of development they have reached, can grow, thanks to a plan which is organic, and therefore centralized and corresponding to a single ownership, public, vertical and authoritarian. In this case, even under socialism a contradiction would reappear in society, but instead of being based on the antagonism between private ownership and wage-labour, that is, on exploitation, its basis would be the contradiction, or series of contradictions, that distort the relationship between rulers and ruled. Mao, we are told, has, through the cultural revolution, broken the continuity of this schema and revealed this dual-power situation lying behind mystificatory talk about "the state of the whole people." In order to do this, however, he has detached the concept of class from the production-relation and concentrated the principles of this concept into a general theory of the contradiction that reappears in any and every type of society known to history. Why should this interpretation of Maoism fit the requirements of the class struggle in Europe? Because in reality it is precisely in Europe that capitalism (they claim) has already advanced beyond the anarchic phase of which Marx spoke, and is now already organized in worldwide form, having solved the basic contradiction between the anarchy

of the property system and the development of the productive forces. Conflicts will therefore no longer proceed essentially at the level of production, but are transferred to the sphere of **power-relations**. In this way, Mao's theory of classes is held to be particularly topical and to constitute a valuable tool for interpretation.

What is open to criticism in this conception of Maoism is not so much its idealistic character (if, that is, being materialist means linking historical processes with production-relations, an idea I should prefer to retain), but its persistence in interpreting Marx (and Lenin) in a way that is closely copied from the ideology of the historical experience of Stalinist society and from that diametrical opposite of it, revisionism: that is, once again, reducing the revolution to **non-private** management of the means of production and of all the productive forces inherited from capitalism.

To reduce the revolution in this way one really has to ignore the intrinsic content of **Marx's** thought, since he speaks not of the crowning but of the overturning of history and conceives the revolution as the complete destruction and reconstruction on radically different lines of the relations between men. One must also forget Lenin, and **Stalin** too; even if, for the former, the relation between break and continuity was experienced not in an academic way but in the very midst of the overthrow of capitalism in Russia, and if, for the latter, this relation remained as an unresolved contradiction between a voluntaristic attitude and the iron laws of a type of *material* development that was accepted because it seemed to be dictated by the inherited situation (in a backward country, moreover), by capitalist machine industry and the capitalist division of labour.

If Mao has been able to raise the question afresh in fundamental fashion, this is because *he turns his back on that type of development*. One reason why he has been able to do this is that that type of development was already in a state of crisis in the 1950s, and was rendered still more dangerous by the catastrophes that an attempt to apply it might provoke in a country even more backward than Russia had been. If, then, Maoism has given us the key to the mechanism that dominates the transitional society, this is just because it has perceived that the capitalist mode of production survived in that society even after the abolition of private ownership of the means of production. In short, Maoism looked at the European socialist in a Marxist way, not through the glass of the consciousness they had of themselves, but as they were in reality. It did this not because it gave up reading Marx, but, on the contrary, because it went back to what Marx wrote. At the same time, Maoism fully revived Lenin's will to overthrow. Both "rediscoveries" were made not as mere theoretical conquests, but in the living midst of a social conflict **still**

in progress, and were deliberately brought out and tested in a mass political battle.

What point would there be in emptying Mao's thought of its essentially materialist character, in identifying, in the sterile fashion of the Second International, materialism with economism, adopting a half-idealist, half-sociological conception of a flow of contradictions the exact antagonisms among which one is unable to define, except through an abstract idea of freedom, a Rousseau-like notion of man? The constant temptation to reduce the revolution to mere voluntarism reveals once more an inability to explain the crisis of capitalism, and the repeated postponement of a socialist solution in the West, through an analysis of the material contradictions of the system. We shall not succeed in avoiding the dissociation (which has prevailed regularly, since the 1920s, in the Western workers' movement) between adhesion to the real process, experienced merely as submission to the compact impermeability and invulnerability of capitalism, and political action that is wholly transferred, through helplessness, to the superstructural sphere. Maximalism, reformism, open class-collaboration or, contrariwise, spasmodic voluntarism and rejection, are only the different forms assumed by this defeat.

If the cultural revolution is of use to us, it is precisely because it offers us the chance—naturally, with all the modifications needed in transferring it to a different historical setting—to put an end to this dissociation. The latter is not just due to laziness or weakness: it is due to the fact that, in our societies, the capitalist mode of production confronts us in its phase of maximum "compactness", at a moment when, thanks to a series of elements of socialization of ownership that Lenin foresaw, this system seems more than ever to have overcome the anarchy of production—at a moment when imperialist development has made it possible, not without destructive "breaks" on the world scale, to build afresh bases for unification and compensatory mechanisms whereby it can fend off its own internal crises.

It is true that the contradiction between productive forces and ownership of the means of production no longer results in causing an explosion. But do not problems arise, precisely at this stage, in the transitional societies, which are of the same order as those that Mao must have glimpsed—in order to avoid them? Contradictions which are no longer exclusively or essentially contradictions between public ownership and private ownership of the means of production—are these not developing? Are we not seeing the complexity and all-embracing character of the capitalist mode of production, its persistence, in its concreteness and in the effects it has in the sphere of consciousness and culture, when the contradictions are lifted from the quantitative to the qualitative plane and when thoroughgoing re-

appropriation of human labour is proposed, through complete destruction of the existing system?

If all this is so, then the solution proposed by Mao differs from that which was put forward in Lenin's day. The point is that Lenin worked in the setting of a backward capitalism, whereas Mao, in contrast to what is supposed, is not so much concerned with under-development as with *the model of the transitional society* as this has been formed in the Soviet Union and as it looked as though it might be reproduced in China. Now at last his method and his critique were being applied to an advanced and complex social formation, in which, despite the differences in the historical and political contexts, we find a structure of productive forces and production mechanisms which is fairly similar to what can be observed in the advanced capitalist societies, and which gives rise to similar problems. Suddenly, in under-developed China, the social conflict is proceeding at the same level as in the advanced capitalist countries; the contradictions characteristic of both types of society can be overcome, here as there, only by an acceleration of the process of social progress towards communism. Any other option would mean retrogression. This is as true of our own society as of the transitional society, for here too any development by way of an intermediate stage has become impossible, and we are faced with a choice the two terms of which are—either total revolution, or the impossibility of any partial alteration of a capitalist structure which has become more and more compact and all-embracing.

It is true that, looked at from this standpoint, the Chinese experience calls in question in a fundamental way the whole traditional strategy of the Western working-class movement. It gives us a key for interpreting the defeats suffered by the Third International and its reformist or "Popular Front" efforts. It helps us to grasp the complex character of the "socialist" societies, rising above the Stalinist or revisionist explanations of them. Finally, it exposes the objectively counter-revolutionary nature of the links binding the Western Communist movement to the present leadership of the USSR.

But the cultural revolution condemns none the less any "leftist" impulses that have not attained its own level of complexity. The problems it has laid bare are incompatible both with extremist verbalism and with attempts to return to the glorious schemas of an historical epoch that is over and done with. The revolutionary Left is compelled, at the present time, to undertake a practical and theoretical reconstruction on the grand scale. What is important is that, for the first time since the 1920s, the necessity of this reconstruction had been forced upon us by a real movement that the opportunists have not succeeded in checking and that the "extremists" cannot claim to have started. This movement has arisen from the

material contradictions, the convulsions that occur within advanced capitalism. And it is no accident if, in May 1968, when this movement manifested itself with maximum strength, China, which was then passing through a period of violent internal struggle, understood and recognized it immediately.

NOTES

1. See *Il Manifesto*, 2nd year, No. 5.
2. Joan Robinson, *La Rivoluzione Culturale in Cina*, Bari, 1969, p. 9 et seq. of the Italian edition (my emphasis, R. R.) [*The Revolution in China*, Penguin, pp. 11-12].
In some Chinese documents produced before and during the cultural revolution, Stalin's mistake is emphasized with particular reference to the draft constitution of 1936, whereas the view put forward in *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* is evaluated more positively.
3. My emphasis, R. R.
4. See, for this type of interpretation, "Ideological roots of the Chinese Revolution", by E. Collotti and Pischel.
5. *La Rivoluzione Culturale Cinese*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1969.
6. Blumer, op. cit.
7. *Fondements de la Critique de l'économie politique* (Paris. Anthropos. 1968), Vol. 1, p. 450 (not "Vol. 2, p. 112"—Trans. English version from *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, London, 1964, pp. 84-85).
Oddly enough, this is what is done both by the "revisionists" and by some groups calling themselves Marxist-Leninist—the former in reproach, the latter in approval.
8. See the introduction to *La cultura di Mao*, published by K. H. Fan, La Nuova Italia, 1968.
9. See Joachim Schickel, *Grande muraglia, grande metodo*, D. Donato, 1970.
10. Before the liberation, Jack Golden: *La Chine kbranle le monde*, [China Shakes The World], Gallimard, 1951, and Edgar Snow, *Stella rossa sulla Cina* [Red Star Over China], Einaudi, 1965, and after it, K. S. Karol, *La Chine de Mao*, and Jan Myrdal, *Un Village de la Chine populaire*, Gallimard, 1964, pointed out the importance of the method of political education constituted by "telling bitterness." The Party forms itself by teaching the poor to "tell their story", that is, *see themselves* and realize how intolerable their condition is.