

# MAOISM—ITS ORIGINS, BACKGROUND, AND OUTLOOK

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## I

WHAT does Maoism stand for? What does it represent as a political idea and as a current in contemporary communism? The need to clarify these questions has become all the more urgent because Maoism is now openly competing with other communist schools of thought for international recognition. Yet before entering this competition Maoism had existed as a current, and then as the dominant trend, of Chinese communism for thirty to thirty-five years. It is under its banner that the main forces of the Chinese revolution waged the most protracted civil war in modern history; and that they won their victory in 1949, making the greatest single breach in world capitalism since the October Revolution, and freeing the Soviet Union from isolation. It is hardly surprising that Maoism should at last advance politically beyond its national boundaries and claim world-wide attention to its ideas. What is surprising is that it has not done so earlier and that it has for so long remained closed within the confines of its national experience.

Maoism presents in this respect a striking contrast with Leninism. The latter also existed at first as a purely Russian school of thought; but not for long. In 1915, after the collapse of the Second International, Lenin was already the central figure in the movement for the Third International, its initiator and inspirer—Bolshevism, as a faction in the Russian Social Democratic Party, was not much older than a decade. Before that the Bolsheviks, like other Russian socialists, had lived intensely with all the problems of international Marxism, absorbed all its experience, participated in all its controversies, and felt bound to it with unbreakable ties of intellectual, moral, and political solidarity. Maoism was from the outset Bolshevism's equal in revolutionary vitality and dynamism, but differed from it in a relative narrowness of horizon and a lack of any direct contact with critical developments in contemporary Marxism. One hesitates to say it, yet it is true that the Chinese revolution, which in its scope is the greatest of all revolutions in history, was led by the most provincial-minded and "insular" of revolutionary parties. This paradox throws into all the sharper relief the inherent power of the revolution itself.

What accounts for the paradox? A historian notes first of all the total absence of any Socialist-Marxist influence in China prior to 1917.1 Ever since the middle of the nineteenth century, from the Opium Wars

and the Taiping Rebellion, through the Boxer Rising and till the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in 1911, China had been seething with anti-imperialism and agrarian revolt; but the movements and secret societies involved in the risings and revolts were all traditional in character and based on ancient religious cults. Even bourgeois Liberalism and radicalism had not penetrated beyond the Great Wall till the beginning of this century: Sun Yat-sen formulated his republican programme only in 1905. By that time the Japanese Labour movement, of which Sen Katayama was the famous spokesman in the Socialist International, had officially embraced Marxism. In Russia the invasion of Western socialist ideas had begun by the middle of the nineteenth century; and ever since Marxism had gripped the minds of all revolutionaries, Populists and Social Democrats. As Lenin put it, Bolshevism stood on the shoulders of many generations of Russian revolutionaries who had breathed the air of European philosophy and socialism. Chinese communism has had no such ancestry. The archaic structure of Chinese society and the deeply ingrained self-sufficiency of its cultural tradition were impermeable to European ideological ferments. Western imperialism managed to sap that structure and tradition, but was unable to fructify the mind of China with any vital liberating idea. Only the revolutionary explosion in neighbouring, yet remote, Russia shook the immense nation from its inertia. Marxism found a way to China via Russia. The lightning speed with which it did so after 1917, and the firmness with which it then struck roots in China's soil are the most stupendous illustration of the "law of combined development": here we see the **most** archaic of nations avidly absorbing the most modern of revolutionary doctrines, the last word in revolution, and translating it into action. Lacking any native Marxist ancestry, Chinese communism descends straight from Bolshevism. Mao stands on **Lenin's shoulders.**<sup>2</sup>

That Marxism should have reached China so late and in the **form** of Bolshevism was the result of two factors: the First World War, exposing and aggravating to the utmost the inner contradictions of Western imperialism, discredited it in the eyes of the East, intensified socio-political ferments in China, made China "mature" for revolution and extraordinarily receptive to revolutionary ideas; while Leninism, with its original, vigorous emphasis on anti-imperialism and the agrarian problem, rendered Marxism, for the first time in history, directly and urgently relevant to the needs and strivings of the colonial and **semi-colonial** peoples. In a sense, China had to "**jump** over" the pre-Bolshevik phase of Marxism in order to be able to respond to Marxism at all.

Yet the impact of undiluted Leninism on China was very brief. **It** lasted only through the early 1920s till the opening of the "national" revolution in 1925. Only a very small tite of the radical intelligentsia acquainted itself with the programme of Leninism and adopted it. (At

the foundation Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921 only twelve delegates were present—Mao Tse-tung was one of **them**—representing a total membership of fifty-seven! At the second Congress, in the following year, the same apostolic number of delegates spoke for a membership of 123. There were still no more than 900 party members in the whole of China at the **beginning** of 1925, shortly before the communists were to find themselves at the head of insurgent **millions**.<sup>3)</sup> On these first communist propaganda circles the basic ideas of Leninism left a deep impression. No matter how much the Stalinized **Comintern** did later to confound the mind of Chinese communism, the germ of Leninism survived, grew, and became transformed into Maoism.

Leninism offered its Chinese adepts a few great and simple truths rather than any clear-cut strategy or precise tactical prescriptions. It taught them that China could achieve emancipation only through revolution from below, for which they must work as tirelessly, indomitably, and hopefully as the Bolsheviks had worked for their revolution; that they ought to distrust any bourgeois reformism and hope for no accommodation with any of the Powers that held China in subjection; that against those Powers they ought to join hands with patriotic elements of the Chinese bourgeoisie, but that they must distrust any temporary bourgeois allies and be ever ready for their treachery; that Chinese communism must look for support to the destitute masses of the peasantry and unfailingly be on their side in their struggles against war-lords, landlords and money lenders; that China's small urban working class was the sole consistently revolutionary and potentially the most dynamic force in society, the only force capable of exercising leadership ("hegemony") in the nation's struggle for emancipation; that China's "bourgeois-democratic" revolution was part of an "uninterrupted," or "**permanent**," revolution, part of a global upheaval in which socialism was bound to overcome imperialism, capitalism, feudalism, and every form of archaic Asian society; that the oppressed peoples of the East should rely on the solidarity with them of the Soviet Union and the Western working classes; that the Communist Party, acting as the vanguard of the movement, must never lose touch with the mass of workers and peasants, but should always be ahead of them; and, finally, that they must guard jealously the party's total independence in policy and organization *vis-à-vis* all other parties.<sup>4)</sup> This was the quintessence of Leninism which the few pioneers of Chinese communism had absorbed before the revolution of 1925–27.

As far as Maoism is concerned, these were still the years of its "pre-history." It was only during the revolution that Maoism began to announce itself; and only in consequence of the revolution's defeat did it form as a special trend in communism. The "pre-historical" period is nevertheless of obvious importance, because some of the lessons Maoism had learned in the school of Leninism, although they were to be overlaid

by other ideological elements, entered firmly into its political make-up.

## II

The next formative influences were the revolution itself and the traumatic shock of its defeat. The years **1925-27** brought to eruption all the national and international contradictions by which China had been torn; and the eruption was astounding in suddenness, scale and force. All social classes—and all the Powers involved—behaved as Leninism had predicted they would. But the most outstanding feature of the events—a feature that was not to be found in the next Chinese revolution and is therefore easily forgotten or ignored—was the revelation of the extraordinary political dynamism of China's small working class.<sup>5</sup> The main centres of the revolution were in the industrial and commercial cities of coastal China, especially Canton and Shanghai. The most active organizations were the trade unions (which had almost overnight become a great mass movement). General strikes, huge street demonstrations and workers' insurrections were the main events and turning points of the revolution, as long as the revolution was on the ascendant. The agrarian upheaval in the background, widespread and deep, was far slower in the take-off, scattered over immense areas, and uneven in tempo and intensity. It gave a nation-wide resonance to the action of the urban proletariat but could not affect the events as directly and dramatically as that action did. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that in **1925-27** China's working class displayed quite the same energy, political initiative, and capacity for leadership that Russia's workers had shown in the revolution of **1905**. For China these years were what the years **1905-06** had been for Russia—a general rehearsal for revolution, with this difference, however, that in China the party of the revolution drew from the rehearsal conclusions very different from those that had been drawn in Russia. This fact, in combination with other, objective factors, discussed later, was to be reflected in the differences between the socio-political alignments in the China of **1949** and the Russia of **1917**.

At the time of the Chinese "rehearsal," official Moscow was already reacting against its own high hopes and international-revolutionary aspirations of the Lenin era—it had just proclaimed Socialism in One Country as its doctrine. The Stalinist and Bukharinist factions, which still jointly exercised power, were sceptical of the chances of Chinese communism, afraid of international "complications," and resolved to play for safety. To avoid challenging the Western Powers and antagonizing the Chinese bourgeoisie, **Stalin** and **Bukharin** acknowledged the Kuomintang as the legitimate leader of the revolution, cultivated "friendship" with Chiang Kai-shek, proclaimed the necessity of a "bloc of four classes" in China, and instructed the Communist Party to enter the **Kuomintang** and submit to its guidance and discipline.

Ideologically, this policy was being justified on the ground that the Chinese revolution was bourgeois in character, and must be kept within the limits of a bourgeois revolution. No proletarian dictatorship was therefore on the order of the day—only "a democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants," a vague and self-contradictory slogan which Lenin had advanced in 1905, when he still held that the Russian revolution would be only "bourgeois democratic."

To follow this course, the Chinese communists had to give up almost every principle Moscow had inculcated in them quite recently. They had, as a party, to resign their independence and freedom of movement. They had to give up, in deeds if not words, the aspiration of proletarian leadership and accept bourgeois leadership instead. They had to trust their bourgeois allies. In order to bring about and keep in being the "bloc of the four classes," they had to curb the militancy of the urban workers and the rebelliousness of the peasantry, which constantly threatened to explode that bloc. They had to abandon the idea of continuous (or permanent) revolution, for they had to "interrupt" the revolution whenever it tended to overlap the safety margins of a bourgeois order, which it constantly tended to do. They had to break the proletarian-socialist momentum of the movement—or else Moscow would denounce them as adherents of Trotskyism. Socialism in One Country, in the U.S.S.R., meant no socialism in China.<sup>6</sup>

At this point Chinese communism fell a prey to its own weaknesses as well as to Moscow's opportunism and national egoism. Having no Marxist tradition of their own to fall back upon, being dependent on Moscow for inspiration, ideas, and the sinews of their activity, finding themselves raised by events of dizzy suddenness from the obscurity of a tiny propaganda circle to the leadership of millions in revolt, lacking political experience and self-confidence, bombarded by an endless stream of categorical orders, instructions and remonstrances from Moscow, subjected to persuasion, threats and blackmail by Stalin's and the Comintern's envoys on the spot, bewildered and confounded, the pioneers of Chinese communism gave in. Having learned all their Leninism from Moscow, they could not bring themselves to say, or even think, that Moscow was wrong in urging them to unlearn it. In the best of circumstances they would have found it very hard to rise to their task and would have needed firm, clear, absolutely unequivocal advice. The advice they got from Moscow was unequivocal only in prompting them to equivocate, to shirk their responsibilities, and to abdicate. They did not know that the Trotskyist Opposition was defying Stalin's and Bukharin's "General Line"; and that Trotsky himself opposed the idea that the Chinese party must enter the Kuomintang and accept its dictates. (They had no contact with the Opposition and Trotsky was criticizing Stalin's and Bukharin's "friendship" with Chiang Kai-shek in the privacy of the Politbureau.) To the Chinese therefore Stalin and Bukharin spoke with the voice of Bolshevism at large.

It was at that moment, the moment of the surrender to the Kuomintang, that Mao first registered his dissent. His expression of dissent was only oblique; but within its terms it was firm and categorical. In the second half of 1925 and at the beginning of 1926 Mao spent much time in his native Province of Hunan, organizing peasant revolts, and participated in communist activity in Canton and Shanghai, representing the party within some of the leading bodies of the Kuomintang. His experience led him to assess the social alignments, especially the class struggle in the countryside, in two essays (*The Classes of Chinese Society*, written in March 1926, and *A Study of the Peasant Movement in the Hunan Province*, March 1927). He did not attempt to analyse China's social structure in depth or to criticize the party line in general; but he made his assessment in terms that conflicted implicitly and irreconcilably with every premiss of the party's and the Comintern's policy.

"... There has not been a single revolution in history," he wrote in March 1926, "that has not suffered defeat when its party guided it along the wrong road. To gain confidence that we shall not lead the revolution along the wrong road. . . we must take care to rally our genuine friends and strike at our genuine enemies . . . [we must be able] to tell our genuine friends from our genuine enemies. . . ." The "genuine friends" of the revolutionary proletariat were the poor peasants and the semi-proletarian elements in the villages; the "genuine enemies"<sup>31</sup>—the landlords, the wealthy peasants, the bourgeoisie, the Right wing of the Kuomintang. He characterized the behaviour of all these classes and groups with such total lack of illusion and such clarity and determination that, in the light of what he said, the "bloc of the four classes," the party's submission to the Kuomintang, and the idea of a containment of the revolution within bourgeois limits appeared as so many absurdities, suicidal for the party and the revolution. He was not yet turning his eyes from the town to the country, as he was to do presently, although he already responded far more sensitively and fully to what the peasants were feeling and doing than to the workers' movement. But he still insisted, in good Leninist style, on the workers' primacy in the revolution; and his emphasis on this reflected the actual relationship of workers and peasants in the events of that period.

By this time in the Soviet Union only the Trotskyists and the Zinovievists still spoke such language;<sup>32</sup> Mao was something of a "Trotskyist" Jourdain unaware of what kind of prose he was using. His role in the party was not prominent enough for the Comintern to notice his heresy; but already in 1926 he was at loggerheads with the Chinese Central Committee and Chen Tu-hsiu, the party's undisputed leader and his own erstwhile intellectual and political guide. In the *Study of the Hunan Peasant Movement*, written shortly before Chiang Kai-shek's coup *d'état*, Mao vented his indignation at those Kuomintang leaders and those "comrades within the Communist Party," who sought to **tame** the peasantry and **halt** the agrarian revolution. "Quite obviously,"

he castigated them, "this is a reasoning worthy of the landlord class . . . a counter-revolutionary reasoning. Not a single comrade should repeat this nonsense. If you are holding definite revolutionary views and happen to be in the country even for a while, you can only rejoice at seeing how the many millions of enslaved peasants are settling accounts with their worst enemies . . . All comrades should understand that our national revolution requires a great upheaval in the country . . . and all should support that upheaval—otherwise they will find themselves in the camp of counter-revolution." This attitude cost Mao his seat on the Central Committee. He was to regain it a year later; but the streak of radicalism or of "pristine Leninism" was to survive in him, even underneath many later accretions, and was to bring upon him the charge of Trotskyism . . . thirty-six years later.

### III

It was, however, from the defeat of the revolution that Maoism took its proper origin, and that it acquired those features that distinguish it from all other currents in communism and from—Leninism.

The defeat caused much heart-searching among the Chinese communists, especially after they had learned the truth about the struggle over China that had gone on in the Russian Politbureau. There were several conflicting reactions to what had happened. Chen Tu-hsiu ruefully acknowledged that he had misguided his party but pleaded that he himself (and the Central Committee) had been misguided by Moscow. Exposing dramatically the inner story of the revolution, relating the many acts of pressure and blackmail to which Moscow had subjected him, he acknowledged that Trotsky had all along been right over China. He was for this expelled from the party, slandered and persecuted by both the Kuomintang and the Comintern.<sup>8</sup> Chen Tu-hsiu and his few friends, arguing from an analogy with the Russian revolution (and accepting Trotsky's guidance), saw ahead of them a period of political stagnation, an interval between two revolutions; and they proposed to act as the Bolsheviks had acted during the interval between 1907 and 1917: retreat, dig in, and hold out primarily among the industrial workers; regain and build up strongholds in the cities which would be the main centres of the next revolution; combine clandestine work with open propaganda and agitation; struggle for "partial demands," wage claims and democratic freedoms; press for the unification of China and call for a National Constituent Assembly; support the peasantry's struggles; use all discontents against Chiang Kai-shek's dictatorship and so gather strength for the next revolution, which would at last be the uninterrupted revolution Lenin and Trotsky had preached.

This was, theoretically at least, a comprehensive prospect and a coherent programme of action. What the Comintern, through its

nominees, Li Li-san and Wang **Ming**, offered was an utterly incoherent combination of basic opportunism and ultra-left tactics, designed to justify the policy of 1925–27 and to save **Stalin's** face. The canon was upheld that the next revolution would also be only "bourgeois democratic"—the canon could be used in future to justify a renewal of a pro-Kuomintang policy and a new "bloc of the four classes." (Stalin always held that policy in reserve, even during his wildest ultra-left zigzags.) Meanwhile the Comintern, denying that the Chinese revolution had suffered any defeat, encouraged the Chinese party to stage hopeless coups and armed risings. These tactics, initiated with the armed Canton insurrection in December 1927, fitted in well with the **Comintern's** new "General Line," which consisted in a forecast of imminent revolution in East and West alike, a call for "direct struggle for power," rejection of any socialist-communist united front in Europe, refusal to defend democratic freedoms, slogans about social-fascism, etc. In Germany this policy led to the disaster of 1933. In China the hopeless risings, coups, and other mad adventures demoralized and disorganized what had been left of the Chinese labour movement after the 1927 defeat.

It was against this background that Maoism made its entry. Although its official historians (and Mao himself) never admit it, Mao shared **Chen Tu-hsiu's** view that the revolution was in decline and that a political lull was ahead. He rejected the Comintern's ultra-left tactics, beginning with the Canton rising and ending with the various versions of "Li Li-sanism." He held, however, that communism would for a long time to come have no chance at all of re-entrenching itself in the cities and regaining footholds in the working class—so deep, as he saw it, was the moral **débâcle** that followed the surrenders of 1925–27. He did not as yet give up the hope that eventually the urban proletariat would rise again; but he turned his eyes wholly to the peasantry, which had not ceased to struggle and rise up in revolts. What was supposed to be merely the agrarian "accompaniment" of the revolution in the cities could still be heard, **loud** and stormy, after the cities had been reduced to silence. Was it possible, Mao wondered, that this was no mere "accompaniment"? Were perhaps the revolts of the peasants not just the backwash of a receding wave of revolution, but the beginning of another revolution of which rural China would be the main theatre?

A historian of Maoism may follow the subtle gradations by which Mao arrived at the affirmative answer to this question. Here it will be enough to recall that late in 1927, after his quarrel with the Central Committee, he retired to his native Hunan; then after the defeat of the Autumn Harvest Rising he withdrew at the head of small armed bands into the mountains on the Hunan–Kiangsi border; and from there he urged the Central Committee to "remove the party as a whole," its headquarters and cadres, "from the cities to **the** countryside." Official Chinese textbooks now credit Mao with having conceived already then,

in 1927-28, the far-sighted strategy that was to bring victory twenty years later. Mao's contemporary writings suggest that at first he thought of the "withdrawal into the countryside" as a temporary expedient and possibly a gamble, but not as desperate a gamble as were the party's attempts to stir the urban workers back into insurrectionist action. Again and again he argued that the "Red Base" <sup>his</sup> and Chu Teh had formed in the Hunan-Kiangsi mountains was only a "temporary refuge" for the forces of the **revolution**.<sup>9</sup> Yet this temporary and provisional expedient did already point to the later Maoist strategy. The party leaders, "opportunists" and "ultra-radicals" alike, rejected Mao's advice, holding that it amounted to a break with Leninism. And, indeed, who could imagine Lenin, after the 1905 defeat, "withdrawing the party" from Petersburg and Moscow and going at the head of small armed bands into the wilderness of the Caucasus, the Urals, or Siberia? The Marxist tradition, in which the idea of the supremacy of the town in modern revolution held a central place, was too deeply ingrained in Russian socialism for any Russian socialist group to embark upon such a venture. Nothing like it occurred even to the Social Revolutionaries, the descendants of the Narodniks, Populists and agrarian socialists.

#### IV

Mao gradually became aware of the implications of his move and in justifying the "withdrawal from the cities," he recognized more and more explicitly the peasantry as the sole active force of the revolution, until, to all intents and purposes, he turned his back upon the urban working class. He treated his new "road to socialism" as a "**uniquely Chinese phenomenon**," possible only in a country which was neither independent nor ruled by a single imperialist Power, which was the object of an intense rivalry between several Powers, each with its own zone of influence, and its own war-lords, compradores, and puppets. That rivalry, he argued, made it impossible for China to achieve national integration; the Kuomintang would no more be able to achieve it, and to set up a cohesive national administration, than previous governments had been. Chiang Kai-shek could smash with a few military blows the concentrated strength of the urban workers, but would not be able to deal likewise with the peasantry, which, being dispersed, was less vulnerable to the white terror and could fight on for many years. There should therefore always exist "pockets" in rural China where the forces of revolution could survive, grow, and gather strength. Renouncing the prospects of a revolutionary revival in the towns, Maoism banked on the permanence of the agrarian revolution.

Mao assumed in effect a prolonged stalemate between the defeated urban revolution and a paralytic counter-revolution, a prolonged and unstable equilibrium between the divided imperialisms, the impotent **Kuomintang** bourgeoisie, and the apathetic working class. The stale-

mate would allow the peasantry to display its revolutionary energies, and to support the communists and their Red Bases as scattered islands of a new régime. From this assumption he drew (in 1930) this broad generalization about the international prospects of communism:

If... the subjective forces of the Chinese revolution are weak at present, so are also the reactionary ruling classes and their organization... based on a backward and unstable socio-economic system... In Western Europe... the subjective forces of the revolution may at present be stronger than they are in China; but the revolution cannot immediately assert itself there, because in Europe the forces of the reactionary ruling classes are many times stronger than they are in China... *The revolution will undoubtedly rise in China earlier than in Western Europe* (my italics).<sup>10</sup>

This assumption, so characteristic of Maoism, was not altogether original—it had appeared fleetingly in some of Lenin's, Trotsky's, Zinoviev's, and Stalin's reasonings a decade earlier.<sup>11</sup> But Mao made of it the cornerstone of his strategy, at a time when no other communist school of thought was prepared to do so. In retrospect, the events have amply justified him. Yet if the Maoist orientation and action are judged not retrospectively, but against the background of the late 1920s, and early 1930s, they may not appear as faultless as they seem now. It may be argued that the superiority of the "reactionary ruling classes" in Western Europe would not have been so overwhelming, and that it might even have crumbled, if the Stalinist and Social-Democratic self-defeating policies (passivity *vis-à-vis* rising Nazism, and the shams of the Popular Fronts) had not worked to preserve and enhance it. One may further argue that the Maoist road of the Chinese revolution was not necessarily predetermined by the objective alignment of social forces, that the Chinese working class might have reasserted itself politically, if the Comintern had not recklessly wasted its strength and if the Chinese party had not "withdrawn from the cities," and so deserted the workers, at a time when they needed its guidance more than ever. As so often in history so here, the objective and subjective factors are so enmeshed and intertwined after the events that it is impossible to disentangle them and determine their relative importance.

It should further be noted that the period of the middle 1930s was extremely critical for Maoism; its major premisses were brought under question and nearly refuted by the events. In the south of China, the area to which Mao's action had been confined till 1935, the peasantry was utterly exhausted by its many revolts and was crushed by Chiang Kai-shek's punitive expeditions. The Red Bases of Hunan and Kiangsi, having held out against Chiang's "extermination drives" for seven years, were succumbing to blockade and attrition. Mao and Chu Teh just managed to lead the Partisans out of the trap and start on the Long March. They thereby acknowledged their defeat in that part of China which had been the main theatre of their operations. It looked

as if the counter-revolution, far from being impotent in the countryside, had demonstrated its superior strength there and gained a decisive advantage. In the meantime, the workers of Shanghai and other coastal cities had shown a new defiance and staged turbulent strikes and demonstrations. But, lacking competent leadership and organization, they were defeated again and again. Maoist historians cast a veil of obscurity over this chapter of the movement in the cities, precisely because it raises the question whether under effective guidance those struggles of the urban workers might not have opened up a new revolutionary situation much earlier than it could be opened up from the country. Was it inevitable that the interval between the two revolutions should last not ten years, as it lasted in Russia, but more than twice as long? Or had the Maoist withdrawal from the cities something to do with it? Whatever the truth of the matter—the historian can pose the question but not answer it—around 1935 the Maoist strategy was on the point of collapse and nearly bankrupt. These facts are recalled here not for any polemical purpose, but because they lead to a conclusion of some topical relevance, namely, that Maoism as a strategy of revolution owes its ultimate vindication to an extraordinarily complex and largely unpredictable set of circumstances.

In 1935 Mao fought his way out of the impasse by means of the Long March, which has since become the heroic legend of Chinese communism. Yet at the end of the Long March Mao had under his orders only one-tenth of the force he had before the March—30,000 out of 300,000 Partisans.<sup>12</sup> What saved Maoism and decisively contributed to its further evolution were, apart from its own heroic determination to survive, two major events or series of events: the Japanese invasion, and the deliberate de-industrialization of coastal China by the invader. The Japanese conquest deepened the contradictions between the imperialist Powers and interrupted the unification of China under the Kuomintang. It thus reproduced that impotence of the reactionary ruling class on which Mao had based his calculations. Northern China was in turmoil; the Kuomintang was unable to assert its military control there and to prevent the emergence and consolidation of the Northern "Soviets." Maoism derived fresh strength from the Kuomintang's inability to secure the nation's independence and from its own revolutionary-patriotic, "Jacobin," stand against Japan. On the other hand, with the systematic de-industrialization of coastal China, the small working class was removed from the scene. As the Japanese dismantled industrial plant in Shanghai and other cities, the workers dispersed, became *declassés*, or vanished in the country.<sup>13</sup> From this fact Maoism obtains a kind of retroactive vindication. Henceforth no one could hope for the rise of a new "proletarian wave" in the cities. The class alignments of 1925–27 could not be expected to reappear in the next revolution. The Marxist-Leninist scheme of class struggle became inapplicable to China. The peasants were the sole force struggling to subvert

the old order; and Mao's party focused and armed all their rebellious energies. It was now, in the late 1930s, that Mao finally formulated the main and most original principle of his strategy: The Chinese revolution, unlike other revolutions, will have to be carried from country to **town**.<sup>14</sup>

## V

The relationship between Maoism and Stalinism was ambiguous from the beginning. The motives which had led Maoism to take on the protective colour of Stalinist orthodoxy are obvious enough. In the late 1930s, Mao and his colleagues were aware of the weight of the influence on Chinese affairs that Stalin's government would exercise in consequence of the Second World War; and they feared that it might exercise it in a narrowly self-interested manner, and as opportunistically as in 1925-27. They knew their dependence on Moscow's goodwill; but they were determined *not* to allow Moscow to use them as it had used Chen Tu-hsiu, Li Li-san, and Wang Ming. They were determined to prevent another abortion of the Chinese revolution. They played, therefore, a most intricate game, pursuing their independent strategy without arousing Stalin's suspicion and wrath. Stalin could not have been quite unaware of this. Yet the Comintern neither sanctioned nor condemned Mao's "un-Marxist" and "un-Leninist" strategy. Stalin would not have tolerated anything like the Maoist heresy in any Communist Party situated in a sphere of world politics which he considered more vital to his interests. But Maoism had started upon its career on what looked to Stalin like a remote periphery; and Mao behaved as some heretics **had** once behaved in the Catholic Church who, defying their local bishop or cardinal, strenuously avoided any collision with the Pope himself. Later, when Maoism moved closer to the centre of Chinese politics, it was already too strongly entrenched—yet was outwardly still submissive enough—for Stalin to conclude that to excommunicate Mao was both risky and unnecessary. He did not himself believe, not even as late as 1948, that Mao's Partisans would ever be able to conquer the whole of China and carry out a revolution; he was willing to use them as bargaining counter or instruments of pressure on Chiang Kai-shek, whom he again considered his chief ally in Asia.

In the Comintern the years after 1935 were again a period of "moderation," the period of Popular Fronts. Translated into Chinese terms, the policy of the Popular Fronts meant the re-establishment of the "bloc of the four classes" and of the "friendship" between the Kuomintang and the communists, this time in a united front against the Japanese invader. The old, never abandoned and now emphatically reasserted canon about the exclusively bourgeois-democratic character of the Chinese revolution served as the "ideological" justification of this turn of policy. For Maoism, engaged as it was in civil war against the Kuomintang, the **Comintern's** new demands were a severe trial. **Only**

the show of an unreserved acceptance of the Comintern's line could prove that Mao and his comrades remained loyal to Stalinism. And so Mao "moderated" his **Yenan** regime and his propaganda and agitation; he appealed to the Kuomintang for patriotic solidarity and joint action against Japan; and he even used his influence to save Chiang **Kai-shek's** position and probably even his life during the Sian incident. Yet the Partisans never yielded to the Kuomintang even as much as an inch of their territory and power.

Mao's Stalinism was in some respects, however, more than sheer mimicry. The persistence with which Mao asserted and reasserted the purely bourgeois character of the Chinese revolution accorded well with the complete identification of his Partisans with the peasantry. To the great mass of the peasantry the perspective of an "uninterrupted revolution," that is of a revolution solving the land **problem**, unifying China and also opening *up* a socialist upheaval, was either meaningless or unacceptable. In the primitive pre-industrial society of Shensi and Ningsia—where Mao's writ ran during the **Yenan** period—there was no room for the application of any measures of socialism. It was only after its conquest of the cities in 1949 that Maoism was to run up against the inevitability of the uninterrupted (permanent) revolution and obey its dictates.

## VI

From the theoretical Marxist viewpoint the central question posed by all these events is how a party, which had for so long based itself only on the peasantry and acted without any industrial workingclass behind it, was after all able to go beyond the "bourgeois"-agrarian upheaval and initiate the socialist phase of the revolution. Communist writers have so far avoided discussing this embarrassing question frankly and have allowed anti-communist "Marxologists" to monopolize it. Has not the course of events in China, the latter argue, refuted once and for all the Marxist and the Leninist conceptions of revolution and socialism? Surely, the idea of proletarian revolution in China belongs to the sphere of mythology—and, surely, the Chinese experience shows up the Russian revolution too to have been the work of a ("power hungry," "totalitarian") intelligentsia which used the workers and their allegedly socialist aspirations only as the ideological cover for its own ambitions. **All** that both these revolutions have achieved, M. Raymond Aron, for instance, is quick to point out, is merely to change the ruling elites, which is nothing surprising to anyone who has learned his lessons from Pareto and Max **Weber**. (Even a writer like the late C. Wright Mills, convinced of the relevance of Marxism to the problems of our age, concluded that not the working class but the revolutionary intelligentsia is the real historic "agency" of socialism.) Ex-Marxists, who have found out that socialism has been "the illusion of our age," and

that the reality behind it is state capitalism or bureaucratic collectivism, invoke the old Marxist dictum that "socialism will be the work of the workers or it will not be at all." How then, they ask, is it possible to speak of a revolution in which the workers have played no part, as being socialist in any degree whatsoever? In a different context and on a different level of argument, the question arises whether the famous Russian controversy between Narodniks and Marxists over the relative roles of workers and peasants in modern revolution has in fact been as irrevocably resolved as it seemed to have been until recently. Even if the Marxists were right in Russia, are the Narodniks not vindicated in China? Has not the peasantry there turned out to be the sole revolutionary class, the decisive agent of socialism?

There is no question that the record of Maoism compels a critical review of some habitual Marxist assumptions and reasonings. How this is necessary is illustrated *inter alia* by the assessment of Maoism which Trotsky gave in the 1930s. Grasping all the intensity of the agrarian upheaval in China, but apprehensive about the Maoist withdrawal from the cities, Trotsky bluntly ruled out the possibility of the consummation of the Chinese revolution without a previous revival of the revolutionary movement among the urban workers. He feared that Maoism, despite its communist origin, *might* become so completely assimilated with the peasantry as to become nothing but its mouth-piece, that is the champion of the small rural proprietors. If this were to happen, Trotsky went on, Mao's Partisans, on entering the cities, might clash in hostility with the urban proletariat and become a factor of counter-revolution, especially at that critical turn when the revolution would tend to pass from the bourgeois into the socialist phase. Trotsky's analysis, reverberating unmistakably with decades of the Russian Marxist-Narodnik controversy and the experience of the Russian revolution, was reduced *ad absurdum* by some of his Chinese disciples who denounced the victory of Maoism in 1949 as a "bourgeois and Stalinist counter-revolution."<sup>15</sup>

The phenomenon of a modern, socialist (or be it even "bureaucratic collectivist") revolution of which the working class had not been the chief driving force stood indeed without precedent in history. What drove the Chinese revolution beyond the bourgeois phase? The peasantry was interested in the redistribution of land, the abolition or reduction of rents and debts, the overthrow of the power of the landlords and money-lenders, in a word in the "bourgeois"-agrarian upheaval. It could not give the revolution a socialist impulse; and Maoism, as long as it operated only within the peasantry, could not have been more reticent than it was about the prospects of socialism in China. This changed with the conquest of the cities and the consolidation of Maoist control over them. Yet the cities were almost dead politically, even if a galvanized remnant of the old labour movement stirred here and there.

We are confronted here, on a gigantic scale, with the phenomenon of "substitutism," i.e. the action of a party or a group of leaders which represents, or stands in the stead of, an absent, or inactive, social class. The problem is familiar from the history of the Russian revolution, but it presents itself there in quite a different form. In Russia the working class could not have been more conspicuous as the driving force of the revolution than it was in 1917. Yet, after the civil war, amid utter economic ruin and industrial collapse, the working class shrank, disintegrated, and dispersed. The Bolshevik party set itself up as its *locum tenens*, and as trustee and guardian of the revolution. If the Bolshevik party assumed this role only some years after the revolution, Maoism assumed it long before the revolution and during it. (And Mao and his followers did this without any of the scruples, compunction, and crises de conscience that had troubled Lenin's party.)

Liberal or "radical" Paretists, who see in this yet another proof that all that revolutions achieve is a change of ruling Clites, have still to explain why the Maoist Clite was determined to give the revolution a socialist (or collectivist) turn, instead of keeping it within bourgeois limits. Why has the Chinese communist Clite behaved so differently from the Kuomintang Clite? This was not even the case of a "young" Clite replacing an old and "exhausted" one, for both élites were contemporaries and had entered the political stage almost simultaneously. Why then have Mao and his comrades given China a new social structure, while Chiang Kai-shek and his friends floundered hopelessly in the wreckage of the old? And what accounts for the stern puritanical morale of Maoism and for the notorious corruption of the Kuomintang? The answer surely is that Chiang Kai-shek and his men identified themselves with the classes that had been privileged under the old order, while Mao and his followers embraced the cause of those that had been oppressed under it. Behind the change of the Clites there was a profound transformation in the basic social relationships of China, the decline of one social class and the rise of another. No one doubts the extent to which the peasantry backed the Partisans during the twenty-two years of their armed struggle—without that support they would not have been able to hold out, to make the Long March, to shift their bases from one end of China to the other, to keep the Kuomintang's greatly superior military strength engaged all the time, to repulse so many "annihilation drives," etc. So strong and intimate were the ties between the Partisans and the peasantry that at one time Mao appeared to many, to friend and foe alike, as the commander of a gigantic jacquerie rather than as the leader of a Communist Party—as a kind of Chinese Pugachev.

Yet this Chinese Pugachev, or super-Pugachev, had gone through the school of Leninism; and no matter how far he deviated from it in his methods of action, the general ideas of Leninism continued to govern his thought and action. He did not abandon his commitment to

that alignment lay in the collectivist structure of the Chinese economy. As I have pointed out elsewhere, "the revolutionary hegemony of the Soviet Union achieved [despite Stalin's initial obstruction] what otherwise only Chinese workers could have achieved—it impelled the Chinese revolution into an anti-bourgeois and socialist direction. With the Chinese proletariat almost dispersed or absent from the political stage, the gravitational pull of the Soviet Union turned **Mao's** peasant armies into agents of **collectivism**."<sup>16</sup>

No Marxist textbook has or could have foreseen so original a concatenation of national and international factors in a revolution: Maoism does not fit into any preconceived theoretical scheme. Does this refute the Marxist analysis of society and conception of socialism? When Marx and **Engels** spoke of the working class as the agency of socialism, they obviously presupposed the presence of that class. Their idea had no relevance to a pre-industrial society in which such a class did not exist. It should be recalled that they themselves pointed this out more than once; and that they even made allowance for the possibility of a revolution like the Chinese. They did this in the exchanges of views they had with the Russian Narodniks in the 1870s and 1880s. The Narodniks, we know, saw Russia's basic revolutionary force in the peasantry—no industrial working class existed as yet in their country. They hoped that by preserving the obshchina, the rural commune, the Russia of the muzhiks could find her own way to socialism and avoid capitalist development. Marx and **Engels** did not dismiss these hopes as groundless. On the contrary, in a well known letter addressed, in 1877, to Otechestvennye Zapiski Marx declared that Russia had "the finest chance [to escape capitalism] ever offered by history to any nation"; and that even as a pre-industrial agrarian society she could start moving towards socialism. For this, as he saw it, one condition was necessary, namely that Western Europe should make its socialist revolution before Russia had succumbed to capitalism. Russia would then be carried forward by the gravitational pull of Europe's advanced, socialist economy. Marx repeated this view some years later in an argument with Vera Zasulich, pointing out that his scheme of social development and revolution, as he had expounded it in *Das Kapital* and elsewhere, applied to Western Europe; and that Russia might well evolve in a different manner. **Engels** expressed himself in the same sense even after **Marx's death**.<sup>17</sup>

All this has been well known and many times discussed. What has been less clear is the implications of this argument. How did Mam view the social alignments in that hypothetical Russian revolution which he anticipated? Evidently he did not see the industrial working class as its chief driving force. The revolution could find its broad base only in the peasantry. Its leaders had to be men like the Narodniks, members of the intelligentsia, who had learned something in the Marxist school of thought, had embraced the socialist ideal, and considered

themselves to be the trustees of all the oppressed classes of Russian society. The Narodniks were, of course, the classical *zamestiteli*, the arch-substitutists, who acted as the *locum* tenentes for an absent working class and a passive peasantry (the muzhiks did not even support them) and who championed what they considered to be the progressive interest of society at large. Yet Marx and Engels encouraged them to act as they did and trusted that their action would be fruitful for socialism, if revolution in more advanced countries transformed the whole international outlook early enough.

True, Marx's prospect failed to materialize in Russia because, as Engels pointed out much later, the Western European working classes had been "far too slow" in making their revolution and in the meantime Russia had succumbed to capitalism. But on an incomparably larger scale and against a changed international background, that prospect has materialized in China. It should be noted that the Maoists were far more broadly based on the peasantry than the Narodniks had ever been, that their socialist consciousness was far more mature—they engaged in mass action not in individual terrorism; and that, on assuming power, they could lean on the advanced collectivist structure of the U.S.S.R., which even as an economic Power was rising to the second place in the world. In proclaiming that socialism can be the work only of the workers, Marxism did not preclude the inception of socialist revolution in backward pre-industrial nations. But even in such nations the working class remains the chief "agency" of socialism in the sense that fully fledged socialism cannot be attained without industrialization, without the growth of the working class and its self-assertion against any post-revolutionary bureaucracy, in a word without the real, social and political ascendancy of the "proletariat" in post-capitalist society.

## VII

The present outlook of Maoism has crystallized in the post-revolutionary period, which has now lasted nearly fifteen years. Yet the seizure of power was not for the Chinese communists the sharp and decisive turn in their fortunes it had been for the Bolsheviks: even as Partisans they had controlled considerable areas of their country; their leaders and cadres had been half-rulers and half-outlaws before they became full rulers. On gaining national victory, the party had to "urbanize" itself and to cope with a wide range of new tasks. But it was less dependent on the old bureaucracy for the business of government than the Bolsheviks had been and therefore probably less exposed to infiltration by socially and ideologically alien elements.

It is unfortunately impossible to be categorical or precise about these questions, because the Maoists do not provide us with enough information. Such is their secretiveness that we know incomparably less of the

nothing to improve the lot of the workers and peasants, or rather to prevent its disastrous worsening. "Is this what we have made the revolution for?" "Is this how the Bolsheviks keep their promises?"—these were the angry questions the Russian workers and peasants asked. A gulf was already fixed between the rulers and the ruled; a gulf, which it was impossible to bridge; a gulf to which the Bolsheviks reacted with a self-defensive, panicky distrust of society and which they perpetuated and deepened thereby until there was no escape from it; a gulf which yawns ominously through the whole record of Stalinism.

In China, by contrast, the people blamed Chiang Kai-shek's government for all the devastation and misery of the civil war. The revolution came as the conclusion, not the opening of hostilities. The communists, having seized power, could at once give their undivided attention to their economic problems and use at once all available resources constructively, so that very soon the lot of the people began to improve and went on improving steadily. And so the first years of the new régime, far from producing disillusionment, were characterized by rising popular confidence. If the Bolsheviks set out to industrialize Russia after they had nearly exhausted their political credit with the masses, the Maoists were able to draw on an immense and growing credit. They had far less need to use coercion in the realization of their ambitious programme. They did not have to resort to the inhuman labour discipline Stalin had imposed on the workers; or to send punitive expeditions to the villages in order to extract grain, to deport huge masses of peasants, etc. Lenin once said that it had been easy to make the revolution in Russia, but far more difficult to build socialism; and that in other countries it would be far more difficult to overthrow the bourgeoisie, but much easier to cope with the constructive tasks of the revolution. Lenin made this prediction with an eye to Western Europe, but to some extent it has come true even in China. Although the material resources of the Chinese revolution were so much poorer than those of the Russian, its moral resources were larger; and in revolution as in war the Napoleonic rule holds good that the moral factors are to the material ones as three to one.

Maoism has therefore been far less hag-ridden with fear than Stalinism had been. As in the nation at large so within the ruling party the tensions have been less explosive and destructive. Here, paradoxically, Maoism benefits from certain advantages of backwardness, whereas Bolshevism suffered from progressiveness. The establishment of the single party system in China was not the painful and dramatic crisis it had been in Russia, for the Chinese had never had the taste of any genuine multiparty system. No Social Democratic reformism had struck roots in Chinese soil. Maoism has never had to contend with opponents as influential as those that had defied Bolshevism: there were no Chinese Mensheviks or Social Revolutionaries. And, lacking Marxist tradition, and the habits of inner party freedom, the

"inner story" of the fifteen years of their rule than we know from official Bolshevik sources about the early periods of the Bolshevik régime. However, a comparison between Maoism and Bolshevism, viewed at approximately the same remove from the moment of the revolution, a comparison between the China of 1963–64 and the Soviet Union of the early 1930s, based only on the generally established facts, brings out certain crucial similarities, differences, and contrasts which may help to illumine the picture of Maoism in the post-revolutionary era.

It is a truism that the Chinese revolution has occurred in a socio-economic **environment** far more backward than that in which the Russian revolution had taken place. China's industrial output had never been more than a fraction of the Russian, an infinitesimal fraction in relation to the needs of a far larger population. The predominance of the archaic rural structure of society was almost absolute. The Chinese peasantry was even more primitive than the Russian (although, unlike the latter, it had not been subjected to centuries of serfdom, a fact which may show to some advantage in its character—in the greater independence, sobriety, and industriousness of the Chinese peasants). Age-old economic, technological, and social immobility, rigid survivals of tribalism, despotic ancestral cults, immutable millenary religious practices—all these have made the task of the Chinese revolution even more difficult and have affected Maoism itself, its methods of government and ideological outlook. Bent on industrializing China, Maoism has had to initiate primitive socialist accumulation on a level far lower than that on which accumulation had proceeded in Russia. The extraordinary scarcity of all material and cultural resources has necessitated an unequal distribution of goods, the formation of privileged groups, and the rise of a new bureaucracy. National history, custom, and tradition (including the deep philosophical influences of Confucianism and Taoism) have been reflected in the patriarchal character of the Maoist government, the hieratic style of its work and propaganda among the masses, and the magic aura surrounding the leader. Like Stalinism (and partly under its influence), Maoism allows no open discussion or criticism of its high priest and hierarchy. And the fact that for two decades before its rise to power the party had existed as a military organization has favoured the perpetuation of unquestioning discipline and blind obedience in its ranks.

Yet encumbered as it is by the greater backwardness of its environment, the Chinese revolution has in some respects been more advanced than the Russian, if only because it has come after it. It has never experienced the fearful isolation that has cramped and crippled the mind and the character of Bolshevism. It has come into the world as a member of the "socialist camp," with the U.S.S.R. as its powerful, though difficult, ally and protector; even the exposed flanks of Red **China** have to some extent been protected by the high tide of **anti-**

imperialist revolt that has swept Asia. Despite American hostility, Mao's China did not have to beat off anything like the "Crusade of fourteen nations" that the Russia of Lenin and Trotsky had to repulse. In embarking upon primitive socialist accumulation China was not wholly reduced to her own meagre resources: Russian assistance, limited though it was, helped her in priming the pump of industrialization. More important than the material aid was the Russian experience from which the Maoists could learn: China did not have to pay the terrible price for pioneering in socialization and economic planning Russia had had to pay. Her industrialization, despite the partial failure of the Great Leap, has proceeded more smoothly than Russia's did in the early stages. And, despite a long sequence of natural calamities and bad harvests, Red China has not known any of the terrible famines that the Soviet Union suffered in 1922 and 1930–32, when millions of people starved to death.

Altogether, the social tensions have not been even remotely as acute and dangerous in China as they had been in the Soviet Union. Nor has the post-revolutionary conflict between the rulers and the ruled been as severe and tragic. Maoism in power has enjoyed the peasants' confidence to a degree which Bolshevism has never attained. The Chinese have been far less reckless and brutal in collectivizing farming; and for a long time far more successful. Even the rural communes do not seem to have antagonized the peasants as disastrously as Stalin's collectivization did.

The fact that the Chinese peasantry has not been driven into a mortal enmity towards the *régime* has influenced the behaviour of all other social classes, of the workers who, recruited from the peasantry, are bound to reflect its moods; and of that section of the intelligentsia which has its roots in the country. Nor has the Chinese bourgeoisie been as hostile and aggressive towards the new *régime* as the Russian bourgeoisie, feeling the peasantry's backing, was in its time; and Mao's government has treated the bourgeoisie more prudently than Lenin's government did; wherever possible it has preferred to buy off the small entrepreneurs and merchants rather than expropriate them.

Yet another difference in the starting points of the two revolutions has decisively contributed to making the social climate in China much milder than in the Soviet Union. In Russia the civil war was waged *after* the revolution, whereas in China it had been fought *before* the revolution. The question whether communists enter the civil war as a ruling party or as a party of opposition is of the greatest consequence for their subsequent relationship with all classes of society. If, like the Bolsheviks, they have to fight as a ruling party, they bear in the eyes of the people the odium of the devastation, suffering, and misery caused by civil war—as a rule the people's despair and fury at the conditions of their existence turn against those in office. In 1921–22 the Bolsheviks had wielded power for four or five years, during which they could do

nothing to improve the lot of the workers and peasants, or rather to prevent its disastrous worsening. "Is this what we have made the revolution for?" "Is this how the Bolsheviks keep their promises?"—these were the angry questions the Russian workers and peasants asked. A gulf was already fixed between the rulers and the ruled; a gulf, which it was impossible to bridge; a gulf to which the Bolsheviks reacted with a self-defensive, panicky distrust of society and which they perpetuated and deepened thereby until there was no escape from it; a gulf which yawns ominously through the whole record of Stalinism.

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habits of open debate and criticism, Maoism was never in the throes of a deep conflict with its own past, such as troubled the Bolshevik mind when it was being forced into the monolithic mould. Maoism had so much less to suppress both within itself and in society that it did not have to give to suppression (and self-suppression) the prodigious mental and physical energy the Soviet Communist Party had to waste on that job.

Nor has the Chinese party become the ruthless promoter of inequality and the champion of the new privileged strata that the Soviet party had become. While in China too, amid all the prevailing want and poverty, the recrudescence of inequality has been inevitable, this has *not* so far been accompanied by anything like Stalin's frantic and shameless drives against egalitarianism. This circumstance throws fresh light on the problem of inequality in post-revolutionary society. Although the "general want and poverty" are, according to Marx, the objective causes for the recrudescence of inequality, the intensity of the process depends on subjective human factors such as the character of the ruling group, the degree of its identification with the new privileged strata, and the viciousness (or the lack of it) with which it is prepared to foster inequality. The fact that Mao and his colleagues have spent the best part of their lives in the midst of the poorest peasants, hiding with their Partisans in the mountains, sleeping in the caves, fighting, marching and starving together, allowing no estrangement between officers and men, and no differences in food rations and uniforms—this extraordinary experience of the Maoists, an experience of over two decades, no other ruling group has gone through, may have left its imprint on their character and in some measure shielded them from the worst corruption of power. Characteristically, the Chinese party insists that its brain workers and dignitaries should periodically descend from their high offices to the factories and farms and, for about a month every year, perform manual labour, so as not to lose touch with the workers and peasants. Such practices, sometimes bizarre in form, cannot overcome the contradictions between the rulers and the ruled and between brain workers and manual labourers; but they may help to keep these contradictions within certain limits, and they indicate that the egalitarian conscience is not dead even in the ruling group. (On the other hand, Chinese officialdom, like the Russian, refuses to disclose just how wide are the discrepancies between high and low wages and salaries, which suggests that it is afraid of disclosing the real scope of the existing inequality).

Against these features which distinguish so favourably Maoism from Stalinism must again and again be set the marks of its backwardness, which make for its affinity with Stalinism. The Chinese party is strictly monolithic, far more so than the Soviet party is now, in the post-Stalin era. Having had no proletarian background and no Marxist, socialist-democratic traditions of its own—having formed itself at a time when

the whole Communist International was already Stalinized—Maoism was born into the monolithic mould and has lived, grown, and moved within it, as the snail moves within its shell. Except for one pregnant moment (when the Hundred Flowers were to blossom all over China), Maoism has taken its monolithic outlook for granted. The Leader's infallibility is at least as firmly established as it had ever been in Russia, with this difference that for about twenty-five years no one has seriously challenged it. The Chinese party has not so far been involved in any convulsions as terrible as those that once shook the Russian party. It has had its important and obscure purges, one of which resulted in the "liquidation" of Kao Kang in 1955; but the composition of the ruling group has not significantly changed since the days of the revolution or even of the Partisan struggle. Mao has not had to contend against a Trotsky, a Bukharin, or a Zinoviev. But neither do the assemblies and conferences of the Chinese party resound with the abject recantations of defeated Opposition leaders that had poisoned Soviet political life by 1932, and were to end in the Moscow trials.

## VIII

The Maoist challenge to Moscow's "leadership" of the Communist movement is partly a result of the consolidation of the Chinese revolution—the Maoists would not have risked such a conflict with Moscow earlier; and consolidation and growth of strength and confidence are expressed in a "shift to the left" and in the Maoist ambition to speak for all the militant elements of world communism.

Here again, a comparison with the Soviet Union of the early 1930s lights up a signal contrast. The prevalent mood in the Soviet Union at that time was one of moral-political weariness and of a reaction against the high revolutionary internationalism of the Lenin era. In the name of Socialism in One Country, the ruling group had initiated ideological "retrenchment," and was seeking to disengage the Soviet Union from its commitment to world revolution—Stalin was already then practising the revisionism of which Mao is now accusing Khrushchev. The fact that at a comparable remove from the revolution, opportunism and national egoism ruled supreme in the Soviet party, while the Chinese party proclaims its radicalism and proletarian internationalism is of immense historic and political consequence.

We have seen how the radical Leninist streak, now submerged and now coming into the open, has run through every phase of Maoism, and in decisive moments did not allow it to yield or surrender, under Stalinist pressure, to the Kuomintang and abandon the road of revolution. It is this, the Leninist element in Maoism that is at present asserting itself more strongly than ever and that seems to be transforming the outlook of Chinese communism. If Bolshevism after some years in power was morally declining, its enthusiasm withering and its ideas

shrinking, Maoism is on the ascendant, discovers new horizons, and enlarges its ideas. The debacle of official Bolshevism was epitomized in its vehement and venomous repudiations of permanent (continuous) revolution, which was not merely Trotskyist doctrine but the principle Lenin's party had deeply and passionately held in the heroic years of the Russian revolution. Maoism, on the contrary, had long and stubbornly dwelt on the limited bourgeois character of the Chinese revolution; yet now it is solemnly proclaiming that permanent revolution is the principle by which it lives, the *raison d'être* of international **communism**. At the close of his career, Mao appears once again as the Trotskyist **Jourdain** he was at its beginning. Like **Trotsky**, but without the latter's deep roots in classical Marxism yet with all the resources of power at his command, Mao is calling communism to return to its source, to the irreconcilable class struggle Marx and Lenin had **preached**.<sup>18</sup>

Part of the explanation for this shift to the left lies certainly in the West's attitude towards Red China, in the continuing American blockade, in the fact that so many Western Powers have not yet recognized the Peking government and have barred it from the United Nations. It should not be forgotten that the first great wave of opportunism came over the Soviet Union in the years 1923–25, after Clemenceau's and Churchill's cordon sanitaire had broken down, when most Western governments established diplomatic relations with Moscow. Beneficial in so many respects, this change in the international position of the Soviet Union had its adverse side: it encouraged the ruling group to practise Realpolitik, to take distance from the oppressed classes and peoples of the world, and to make far-reaching concessions of principle to the "class enemy." China's ruling group has not so far been exposed to such temptations. On the contrary, events constantly remind it that to capitalism's unabated hostility it has one reply only—its own unflinching defiance. Moreover, the ideological retreat of the Russian party was also a reaction to the many defeats the revolution had suffered in Germany and in the rest of Europe between 1918 and 1923; whereas Maoist militancy draws nourishment from the upsurge of anti-imperialism in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Here too, China is benefiting from the fact that she has not been the first country to embark upon the road of socialism. It is proving much more difficult for the capitalist world to tame or intimidate the second major revolution of the century than it was to contain, if not to "roll back," the first.

Of course, grave dangers may be lurking behind the breach between the U.S.S.R. and China. How will Maoism react to isolation from the Soviet Union, if the isolation deepens and hardens? How will it be affected by a relative stabilization of the "national bourgeois" **régimes** in most of the formerly colonial or semi-colonial countries? And if some Western Powers were to try to play China against the Soviet Union, instead of playing the latter against the former—might Peking

not succumb to the temptation? The prospect would be clearer than it is if one could be sure that Maoist professions of revolutionary internationalism are not merely a response to Western provocation but that they genuinely reflect the frame of mind of the Chinese masses. But we know far too little, next to nothing, about that aspect of the problem.

The reliability and effectiveness of the Chinese call for a restoration of pristine Leninism would be far greater if Maoism did not seek to rescue the myths of Stalinism from the discredit into which they have deservedly fallen. In this Maoism is acting from motives of **self-defence**: it has to vindicate its own record, its past commitments, and its rigidly ritualistic party canon which, like every such canon, requires that its formalistic continuity be unalterably upheld. The infallible leader could not have been in error on any of those past occasions on which he extolled the Stalinist orthodoxy. The obeisance Mao paid to the living Stalin compels him to pay obeisance to the dead as well. Maoism's affinity with Stalinism lies precisely in this need to uphold established cults and magic rituals designed to impress primitive and illiterate minds. No doubt, one day China will grow out of these crude forms of ritualistic ideology, as the U.S.S.R. is growing out of them; but that day has not come yet. Meanwhile, the conservative element in Maoism, its backwardness, is at loggerheads with its dynamic element, especially with its revolutionary internationalism. In a similar way, elements of backwardness and advance, differently assorted, have been in constant collision within the Soviet party under **Khrushchev's** leadership. The prospects would be infinitely **more** hopeful if it were possible for the diverse progressive urges in the two great Communist parties to release themselves from the grip of retrograde factors, and to coalesce—if the Chinese fervour for Leninist internationalism went hand-in-hand with a zeal for a genuine and consistent de-Stalinization of the Communist movement. The impossibility to disentangle progress from backwardness is the price that not only Russia and China but mankind as a whole is paying for the confinement of the revolution to the underdeveloped countries. But this is the way history has turned; and now nothing can force its pace. Yet, whatever the contradictions, the motives, and the flaws of Maoism, the fact that Red China is broadcasting to the world the watchwords of revolutionary internationalism, as no one has broadcast them for a very long time, is bound to have deep, wide, positive, and dramatic repercussions in years and decades to come.

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#### NOTES

1. The first Chinese translation of the *Communist Manifesto* appeared only in 1920; it was then that Mao, at the age of twenty-seven, read the *Manifesto* for

the first time. The year before he still went on a pilgrimage to the grave of Confucius, although he was not a believer.

2. A parallel may be drawn here between the fortunes of Marxism and revolution in Europe and Asia. Just as in Europe Marxism first exercised a wide influence in industrial Germany so in Asia it found its first important following in industrial Japan, the "Prussia of the Far East." But in neither of these two "advanced" countries did Marxism go beyond propaganda and agitation. On both continents it fell to the great "backward" nations to accomplish the revolution.
3. Ho Kan-chih, *A History of the Modern Chinese Revolution* (Peking, 1959), pp. 40.45, 63, 84.
4. The Second Congress of the Communist International occupied itself, in 1920, especially with the problems of the colonial and semi-colonial countries; and Lenin was the prime mover of the theses and resolutions on this subject. See Lenin, *Sochinen'ya* (Moscow, 1963), vol. 41.
5. Mao gives the number of Chinese industrial workers, employed in large-scale enterprises as 2 million. There were about 10 million coolies, rikshas, etc. Mao Tse-tung, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya* (Moscow, 1952), vol. I, pp. 24-5.  
Mao explains the decisive role of the workers in the revolution by the high degree of their concentration in big factories, their extraordinarily oppressive conditions, and exceptional militancy. Russia had no more than 3 million workers employed in modern industry about the time of the revolution; and Trotsky explains their decisive role in about the same way.
6. See my account of these events in *The Prophet Unarmed*, pp. 316-38.
7. A comparison of the documents contained in Trotsky's *Problems of the Chinese Revolution* with Mao's writings of 1926-27 shows the complete identity of their views on these points. Ho Kan-chih in *op. cit.* (which is the official Maoist account of the Chinese revolution) unwittingly gives many other illustrations of that identity. Thus, he relates that early in 1926 Mao protested against the Chinese party's decision to vote for the election of Chiang Kai-shek to the Executive Committee of the . . . Kuomintang and to back his candidature to the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. About the same time Trotsky protested in Moscow against Chiang's election as an Honorary Member of the Executive of the Comintern. The Maoist historian blames only Chen Tu-hsiu for the "opportunist" policy, pretending not to know that Chen behaved as he did on Moscow's orders and that Chiang was Stalin's candidate to the post of the Commander-in-Chief. The fact that Chiang was Honorary Member of the Comintern's Executive is not even mentioned in the Maoist *History*.
8. Chen Tu-hsiu's fate—denounced as "traitor" by the Comintern, he was imprisoned and murdered by the Kuomintang police—was a terrible warning to Mao who henceforth avoided any *open* breach with Stalinist orthodoxy, even while he was at loggerheads with its successive Chinese guardians. Mao was never to risk a conflict with both Stalin and Chiang Kai-shek. His cautious, ambiguous attitude towards Stalinism reflected something of the sense of weakness and ultimate dependence on Soviet backing which had caused Chen Tu-hsiu to accept Stalin's and Bukharin's dictates in 1925-27. But unlike Chen, Mao, for all his outward deference to Stalin, was never to give up his own judgment on Chinese affairs and swerve from his own course of action.
9. Mao, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 99-110 and 117 ff and *passim*.
10. Mao, *ibid.*, p. 196.
11. See *The Prophet Armed*, pp. 456-7 and *The Prophet Outcast*, p. 61.
12. Ho Kan-chih, *op. cit.*, p. 270. The author blames the recklessness of the "ultra-lefts" in the party and army for these disastrous losses.
13. A most instructive description of this process and of its political effects is to be found in Chen Tu-hsiu's correspondence with Trotsky (The Trotsky Archives), quoted in *The Prophet Outcast*, pp. 423-4.
14. From what has been said it is clear that the validity of the Maoist method of

revolution is of necessity limited. Mao himself, in the early days of Partisan warfare, used to underline this—he spoke of the "unique Chinese character" of the conditions in which his method could be applied. Only in primitive countries, where the body politic has not achieved national integration (or where it has disintegrated) and where there does not exist any bourgeoisie capable of exercising national leadership, can Partisans enjoying the peasantry's support carry revolution from the country to the towns; and then it depends on the revolutionaries' "ideology" and international connections whether they can impart a socialist impulse to their revolution. An analysis of the social alignments in the Cuban and Algerian revolutions, and in other Afro-Asian upheavals, may show to what extent, and with what variations, the "Chinese" conditions have or have not been reproduced in those countries. Victorious leaders of a Partisan movement are, of course, inclined to claim for their experience wider validity than it inherently possesses. Thus Che Guevara, in his essay on guerrilla warfare, recommends the Castroist strategy to revolutionaries all over Latin America. In those Latin American countries, however, where the bourgeois regime is more broadly based, integrated, and centralized than it was in Cuba under Batista, Che Guevara's recommendation, if acted upon, may lead to abortive coups.

We may mention here as a grotesque curiosity that the leaders of the French counter-revolution in Algeria, the O.A.S. colonels, also tried to "apply some lessons of Maoism." Mao is undoubtedly a great authority on the military aspects of Partisan warfare. But the main secret of the success of his strategy lies in its close combination with agrarian revolution. It is impossible to apply his military prescriptions without his social strategy, as the leaders of the O.A.S. have learned to their detriment.

15. See the controversy over this among the Chinese Trotskyists, reproduced in several issues of the *International Information Bulletin* of the Socialist Workers' Party (New York), for the year 1952. Trotsky's articles on the Chinese Partisans had appeared in the *Byulleten' oppozitsii*.
16. *The Prophet Outcast*, p. 520.
17. *Perepiska K. Marksa i F. Engel'sa s russkimi politicheskimi deyatelayami*, pp. 177-9, 241-2 and *passim*.
18. Mao's view of class antagonisms in post-revolutionary society is also far closer to Trotsky's than to Stalin's. Recently Maoist theorists have written about what Trotsky called the Thermidorian spirit of the Soviet bureaucracy very much along the lines of his argumentation. And several decades after Trotsky, they hint at the "danger of capitalist restoration" in the . . . U.S.S.R.