

Evaluating the Cultural Revolution in China and its Legacy for the Future

By the MLM Revolutionary Study Group in the U.S. (March 2007)



"AT THE MEETING OF A MASS PLEDGE"

The big-character poster reads "A Letter of Pledge." The banner above reads "promote production by making revolution." *Workers' Art Group, Shanghai Steel Factory No. 1*

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This paper is titled “Chinese Foreign Policy During the Maoist Era and its Lessons for Today”—by the MLM Revolutionary Study Group. Please write to mlm.rsg@gmail.com for a copy.

A. How the Cultural Revolution Affected the Revolutionary Movement in the U.S.

Even before the Cultural Revolution was launched in the mid-1960s, many in the U.S. were surprised and inspired by the example of the people of the world’s most populous country successfully driving out the Japanese invaders and the U.S.-backed regime of Chiang Kai-shek. In the anti-war and Black liberation movements, political activists learned of the mass movement of hundreds of millions of Chinese peasants that collectivized agriculture within several years. Comparisons between the advances made by socialist China and imperialist-dominated, poverty-stricken India were common among ‘60s radicals. Moreover, students who rebelled against being trained as white collar bureaucrats and for “ugly American” roles were attracted to the Chinese concept of being “red and expert” because of this concept’s insistence that revolutionary moral and political commitments were not only compatible with developing professional expertise, but were essential to it.

In 1963, weeks before the civil rights March on Washington, the revolutionary Black nationalist Robert F. Williams¹ was in China, where he called on Mao Zedong. At his request, Mao issued an important internationalist statement in support of the Afro-American people’s struggle, which concluded: “The evil system of colonialism and imperialism grew on along with the enslavement of the Negroes and the trade in Negroes; it will surely come to its end with the thorough emancipation of the black people.”

¹ Robert F. Williams (1925-1996) was a pioneer of the modern Black Liberation Movement and its *de facto* international ambassador. As president of the Monroe, North Carolina chapter of the NAACP in the late 1950s, he came under sharp attack from the Ku Klux Klan, local police and other reactionaries. When he urged the local Black community to take up arms in self-defense, he faced death threats and false charges from local and state police—and he and his family went into exile from 1961 to 1969. In Cuba, he continued his activism with a newspaper, *The Crusader*, and a radio program broadcast throughout the South, *Radio Free Dixie*. He then came under criticism and attack from both Communist Party USA members in Cuba and some Cuban Communists for his Black Nationalism, which they claimed was splitting the American working class. “There could be no separate black revolt in the United States, the head of Cuban security told Williams, because white workers must be the primary revolutionary force due to their numbers.” (Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, p. 296). Williams then left Cuba for Vietnam, where he met with Ho Chi Minh, and traveled to China, where he was welcomed by Mao Zedong.

In 1968, after the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., Mao reiterated his support, and stated that “the Afro-American struggle is not only a struggle waged by the exploited and oppressed Black people for freedom and emancipation, it is also a new clarion call to all the exploited and oppressed people of the United States.... It is a tremendous aid and inspiration to the struggle of the people throughout the world against U.S. imperialism.” Mao called on “the workers, peasants and revolutionary intellectuals of every country and all who are willing to fight against U.S. imperialism to take action and extend strong support to the struggle of the Black people of the United States!”² This stance had a tremendous effect on the New Communist Movement (NCM) in the U.S.

In the early 1970s, leading members of the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Party visited socialist China, and eventually nearly all of the groups making up the NCM sent delegations to visit the People’s Republic in the early 1970s. Leaders of the newly emerged women’s liberation movement visited China and were struck by the slogan that “women hold up half the sky,” and that one of the first laws passed by the new government banned forced marriages and gave women the right to divorce. One of the members of the early Revolutionary Union³ who had spent many years in China and had become a student Red Guard there, and others with personal ties to China helped bring stories from the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution back to the U.S. Delegations of intellectuals also brought back news of developments during the Cultural Revolution.⁴

In the late 1960s and early 70s, the Panthers and the Lords sold Chinese revolutionary literature and applied many Maoist principles to their own work, including promoting revolutionary internationalism in the pages of their newspapers. In 1966, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton raised money to buy shotguns for the Panthers’ anti-police patrols by selling Mao’s Red Books on the University of California at Berkeley campus for \$1 each.

In a 1996 speech titled, “The Historical Meaning of the Cultural Revolution and its Impact on the U.S.,” historian Robert Weil explained:

Huey Newton in his book *To Die For The People* talks about many sources of influence on the party: Fidel, Che, Ho, the guerrillas in Angola and Mozambique. But Mao and the Cultural Revolution keep coming through as a kind of guiding or most significant influence, to the extent that, at the time of the Attica Uprising in upstate New York, they were asked by the inmates to negotiate with Rockefeller and Oswald, the head of the prisons. And they in turn called for Mao Zedong to serve as the negotiator between the inmates and the authorities, all the way from Nixon down to Oswald. [Laughter]

² “Oppose Racial Discrimination by U.S. Imperialism, August 8, 1963. www.marxists.org

³ Based on Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, the RU was formed in the San Francisco-Bay Area in 1968. It grew into a national organization and became the Revolutionary Communist Party USA in 1975.

⁴ See, e.g., William Hinton's *Turning Point in China*, 1972; Ruth and Victor Sidel's *Women and Child Care in China*, 1973, and *China! Inside the People's Republic*, by the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, 1972.

You know, we laugh, and we should laugh, but I think it's important to realize how strong this influence was. And that the Panthers, in turn, became in many ways the group that introduced the concepts of Mao and the Cultural Revolution to many other parts of the movement, such as the Asian American movement.⁵

Beyond those who were fortunate enough to go to China, beyond those who were specifically influenced in the ways I just talked about, I think that the ideas of the Cultural Revolution became almost a part of the atmosphere of what people were breathing in this country in that period.

Another of the people I talked to before I came here had a particularly good insight into that. He said, among the different influences in the sixties—and it would certainly be a mistake to reduce all of this in any way to Mao or to China—but that of all of those influences, Mao in particular, and the lessons of the Cultural Revolution in general, were the best at summarizing and universalizing and globalizing the struggles of the 1960s.

Think about all of the key ideas that came out of that period, primarily through Mao and the impact of his words: “Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win,” “Overcome All Difficulties,” “Seize the Day, Seize the Hour”—which the Panthers turned into “Seize the Time”—“To Rebel is Justified,” “From the Masses, To the Masses,” “Combat Liberalism,” “The People and the People Alone are the Motive Force of World History.” These became ideas which people reoriented their entire lives around.⁶

B. Questions Raised by the Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution in China was unprecedented in history. Never before had so many millions of people of all classes and social strata thought about, talked about, and struggled over how to deepen the revolutionary process *in a socialist society*. The struggle was often exhilarating, as indicated by the experience of two U.S. teachers in China:

When we returned to Peking...we entered a dramatic and colorful world that had become a political festival of the masses....[T]he campus was almost deserted after ten o'clock in the morning as students and teachers disappeared into their intense study sessions, organizational meetings, and perusal of Cultural Revolution editorials and documents. Everywhere on the walls of buildings, thousands of big-character posters stared out at us. We were now to live amid a sea of language, a lively world of large blue, red, and yellow ideographs...

⁵ This included three Chinese-American groups Wei Min She (in San Francisco, which was influenced by the RU/RCP), I Wor Kuen (in SF and NYC, which later co-founded the League for Revolutionary Struggle), and the Asian Study Group (in NYC, which went on to form the Workers Viewpoint Organization/Communist Workers Party).

⁶ See www.chinastudygroup.org under ‘articles.’

And it was not only the students who participated in this orgy of writing and reading. Shop clerks, workers, office employees, and bus drivers somehow carried on their work while following the same basic routine as the students. It was a most impressive sight—the population of a country which only twenty years before had been 80 per cent illiterate conducting a national debate through the written word... The formidable organization of the Chinese Communist Party, built up methodically over the decades, had been suddenly overturned and replaced by a communications and organizational network which embraced millions of ordinary citizens in a decision-making apparatus of their own. In the evenings, thousands of mass meetings occurred simultaneously throughout the capital. There the latest political developments were discussed, analyzed, and acted upon.⁷

As inspiring as the Cultural Revolution was to the people of China and to millions in other countries, its defeat and rollback in the years following Mao's death have left many activists with some important questions.

- How is it possible for the masses of working people in a socialist country to continue the revolutionary process and defeat attempts at capitalist restoration?
- What were the obstacles faced by the Cultural Revolution? Even with its theoretical breakthroughs and many practical achievements, why was the Cultural Revolution eventually defeated?
- Were the campaigns against intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution justified? Why was there widespread, at times violent, factional struggle during these years?
- What lessons does the Cultural Revolution have for anti-imperialists and revolutionaries in the 21st century who are looking to the next wave of socialist revolutions?

The methodology we will use is to first discuss the challenges facing socialism in China, including contending forces in the Chinese Communist Party, during the Cultural Revolution and the period immediately preceding it. We examine the political line of Mao and other revolutionaries in the CCP, their goals, and the great achievements of the Cultural Revolution, particularly its most advanced experience. At the same time, we look at the “bigger picture,” including the substantial obstacles faced by the Cultural Revolution, its shortcomings, the reasons for its defeat, and new concepts of socialist society that are being considered by revolutionaries in many countries.

⁷ Nancy and David Milton, *The Wind Will Not Subside: Years in Revolutionary China—1964-1969*, 1976, p. 148. The authors taught at the Beijing First Foreign Languages Institute. The title of their book is taken from a favorite Chinese saying of Mao, "The tree may prefer calm, but the wind will not subside." On the role of dazibaos in the Chinese Revolution, see Goran Leijonhufvad, *Going Against the Tide: On Dissent and Big Character Posters in China*, 1990.

C. Prologue to the Cultural Revolution

To understand the significance of the Cultural Revolution, it is worth recalling that ever since the Communist Manifesto's opening salvo that the specter of communism was haunting Europe, defenders and apologists for capitalism have claimed that socialism (to say nothing of communism) will never work because it goes against human nature and ignores allegedly fundamental economic laws. Moreover, they are quick to add that revolutions only lead to old exploiters and oppressors being replaced by new ones. This view was expressed in the words of "We Won't Get Fooled Again," a song about revolution by The Who, a British rock group in the 1960s and '70s: "Take a look at the new boss, same as the old boss."

The experience of the Soviet Union provided support for that cynicism. When the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution transformed the world's political landscape, millions of people around the world thrilled to the promise of a new world. In the famous words of a U.S. journalist who visited the Soviet Union soon after the Bolshevik Revolution, "I have seen the future, and it works." However, by the early 1960s, you didn't have to be an apologist for capitalism to realize that this socialist future was not working in the Soviet Union. To millions of progressive and revolutionary minded people around the world—including many in the U.S.—the Soviet Union had become an oppressive and bureaucratized caricature of what socialism was supposed to be.⁸ Among revolutionaries it was increasingly understood that state ownership in the USSR had become an empty shell, masking a new form of state capitalism presided over by a revisionist "communist" party.⁹

⁸ In the mid-1950s, Mao used his trademark language to describe officials who thought that everything Soviet should be copied, "Some people say that no matter what, even the farts of the Russians smell good; that too is subjectivism. Even the Russians themselves would admit that they stink!" Lee Feigon, *Mao: A Reinterpretation*, 2002, p. 112.

⁹ The term *revisionist* is applied to people who or organizations which see themselves as upholding Marxist principles and/or creatively adapting them, but in fact put forward an ideology and position that guts Marxism of its revolutionary essence.

In a capitalist society, a revisionist political line (1) makes reforms ends in themselves rather than connecting the people's resistance and struggle for reforms to a revolutionary rupture with existing property and political relations and (2) denies—often based on wishful thinking—the ferocity with which the ruling class(es) will try to retain state power. More generally revisionism denies that the state is an instrument of class rule. This leads to the view that a peaceful transition to socialism is possible and that durable international peace is possible in this, the era of imperialism.

In a socialist society, a revisionist political line (1) asserts that the primary task of socialism is economic development, promotes material incentives and political passivity, and negates the decisive role that consciousness and ideology play in enabling the working class to more directly determine the overall direction of society, (2) serve to defend and widen inequalities in wealth, education, and access to information and decision making power that continue to exist in socialist society, and (3) obscures the existence of classes in socialist society; the material bases for these

What was less obvious to revolutionary minded people at that time was that the same thing was threatening to happen in China. By the early 1960s, many of the revolutionary achievements in the years immediately following the 1949 birth of the People's Republic were being reversed, and the future of socialism was in doubt.

From 1959 to 1961, a series of events took place that put Mao and other revolutionaries in the Communist Party of China on the political defensive.

The Great Leap Forward in 1958 was an ambitious plan to increase industrial and agricultural production. It undertook radical social transformations and led to new levels of socialist consciousness. In one year, 750,000 collective farms were merged into 24,000 people's communes, each of which was composed of dozens of villages and on average 5,000 households. The communes were not just economic units but new social organizations that combined political, educational, cultural and military functions.¹⁰

The scale of the communes made it possible to mobilize large numbers of peasants to work on big irrigation, flood control and land reclamation projects. Rural industrialization leapt forward, with commune-operated shops manufacturing and repairing agricultural implements, small chemical plants producing fertilizer, and the establishment of local crop-processing industries. Tens of millions of women joined the labor force outside their homes for the first time; childcare centers were set up on the communes. The communes funded new primary schools and a network of middle schools and colleges that combined work and study.

In the industrial areas of Shanghai and the northeast, new forms of factory organization replaced the one-man management system that had been patterned after Soviet industry. The system was called the "two participations" (participation of cadres in labor and workers in management), "one reform" (reform of unneeded regulations) and "triple combinations" (of skilled workers, technicians and administrators to solve production problems).¹¹ In order to train workers for new roles in their plants, a system of spare-time schools and colleges attached to factories was established. In some plants, 60 to 70 percent of the workforce was enrolled in these schools.

These were important advances. However, a combination of unrealistic production goals (e.g., doubling steel production in a year), transportation bottlenecks, wasteful "backyard" furnaces that produced low-grade steel, and the diversion of too much labor from agricultural work into other areas effectively brought the Great Leap Forward to a

classes; and the intensity, character and long-term nature of the class struggle necessary to advance along the socialist road to classless society, communism.

¹⁰ Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, 3rd Edition, 1999, pp. 220-227. Meisner's book provides an overview and useful data from the Maoist era, but it has major flaws. Meisner considers China in the Maoist era to have been a non-socialist "bureaucratic state," and opposes the leading role of a Communist Party. While he describes and supports many of the social transformations of the Cultural Revolution, he considers it to have been a failure.

¹¹ Stephen Andors, *China's Industrial Revolution: Politics, Planning and Management, 1949 to the Present*, 1977, pp. 74-84. The "3-1-2" system was a core element of the Anshan Constitution that was codified by Mao based on the experience of advanced factories during the Great Leap Forward. The other elements were putting politics in command; utilizing mass movements; carrying out technical revolution; and strengthening party leadership. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

halt by early 1960.

Particularly in the countryside, some social transformations jumped ahead of the level of development and political consciousness at that time. Some communes were eliminating private plots for farming altogether. There was resistance among the peasants to this policy and to equalizing the income of the production teams (usually 20-30 households) throughout the communes.¹² In addition, Party leaders saw communist society as achievable within the following decade or two. All of this was later criticized as a “communist wind.”

At a party conference in 1959, Mao took responsibility for the overly ambitious goals of the Great Leap Forward and for some of errors in how it had been implemented. He described it as a “partial failure.”¹³ But Mao and his supporters recognized the Great Leap’s achievements as well as its defects, making it possible for many of its goals, especially in such fields as factory management, education and health care, to be more effectively pursued in the Cultural Revolution a decade later.

The Great Leap Forward was followed by three years of severe drought and floods, which affected 60% of China’s agricultural land.¹⁴ In 1960, the Soviet Union pulled out its industrial experts, disrupting production in key industries. In addition, cadre¹⁵ in many areas inflated production figures (the “wind of exaggeration” as it was called), making it difficult to ship grain where it was needed most. While the natural calamities played the major role, these factors combined to create famine conditions in parts of the countryside in 1960-61.¹⁶

¹² As a result, the basic unit of accounting that determined the distribution of income was reduced from the level of the commune to that of the production team.

¹³ Stuart Schram, *Chairman Mao Talks to the People, Talks and Letters: 1956-1971*, 1974, p. 146. This is an invaluable compilation of many previously unpublished works by Mao.

¹⁴ Meisner, p. 235.

¹⁵ “Cadre” is a term applied to both full-time party members and government officials.

¹⁶ Joseph Ball, an expert in demography, has recently analysed several well publicized studies which are based on comparisons of census figures before and after the famine years. Ball demonstrates that these censuses were unreliable, and were only released in the 1980s, when the new regime was engaged in a repudiation of China’s socialist achievements between 1956 and 1976. (www.monthlyreview.org/0906ball.htm) Mobo Gao argues that the 1953 census is grossly inflated. It claimed that China’s population had risen from 450 million in 1947 to 600 million in 1953, which includes the years of civil war between the CCP and the Guomindang. This, by itself, could explain the “missing” tens of millions of people between the 1953 census and the post-famine census. *Gao Village: Rural Life in Modern China*, 1999, pp. 127-128.

In his last book, *Through a Looking Glass Darkly, U.S. Views of the Chinese Revolution*, 2006, William Hinton interviewed villagers from several different provinces who lived through these “three bad years.” They reported short rations, but no deaths due to starvation. Hinton argues persuasively that “a famine exists in a peasant country when people give up trying to survive at home, abandon their land and move out en masse...When you have land abandonment, with millions of people taking to the road and heading toward regions where they hope to find food, such vast migrations are very hard to conceal.” His conclusion is that there was real hunger and even starvation in some localities, but reports of tens of millions of death are not credible. (See Chapter 9 of his book, *The State and the “Great Famine.”*)

In the wake of the Great Leap Forward, revisionists in the party, led by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, seized the initiative. Liu became State Chairman in 1959. Though Mao was the Party Chairman, he was sidelined. Mao later said he was treated like a “dead ancestor” during these years.

With a revisionist political line and leaders in the ascendancy, Chinese society became increasingly stratified and bureaucratized. In 1961, the “70 Articles for Regulations in Industry” was issued, which sought to reverse the industrial transformations of the Great Leap Forward. Under it, managers used individual bonuses to appeal to workers’ and technicians’ narrow self-interest, piecework reappeared, managerial authority was strengthened, and greater emphasis on profitability was placed on the operation of enterprises.¹⁷

As Liu and Deng promoted contracting collective-farmed land out to individual families, the size of the private plots worked by peasant households increased from 5% to 12% of the tillable land.¹⁸ The gap between the cities and countryside in the delivery of modern medical services grew.¹⁹ The higher education system was fostering social inequality by shutting out the children of workers and peasants. Party leaders and cadre were becoming increasingly divorced from the experiences of working people and were developing into a new privileged elite. China was being pulled off the “socialist road.”

While socialism in a country like China must be understood as a form of class rule of the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry, and as a mode of production in which planned production for social needs replaces production for private profit, it is not a static social system. What defines socialism most clearly is the *road* on which it is traveling. Is society expanding or restricting economic, social and political inequalities to the greatest degree possible? Is it promoting mass participation and debate, or political passivity, in factories, farms, schools and governmental institutions? Is it promoting internationalism and leading mass campaigns to support revolution in other countries? Is it combating “me first” capitalist ideology with struggle for the collective interest? Is it challenging national oppression and male supremacy? And of critical importance, what political line is the working class’ political leadership in the communist party and state organs

Moreover, the death total over three years of drought and floods would have been many times higher in pre-liberation China. The collectivization of agriculture and the construction of infrastructure such as dams and irrigation systems in the 1950s gave peasants new protection against natural calamities. Measured against India and Indonesia, mainly peasant countries which did not go through revolutionary transformations, the Chinese people made enormous gains in life expectancy and overall health and wellbeing during the socialist period.

¹⁷ Meisner, p. 265. Andors, pp. 119-136. The premise of the 70 Articles was that managerial control and the profit motive, including bonuses for managers, were the best guarantee for efficiency at the plant level and in the allocation of investment and resources in the economy as a whole. This effectively abandoned socialist planning and production that placed social needs first.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁹ In 1965, Mao commented: “Tell the Ministry of Public Health that it only works for fifteen percent of the total population of the country....while the broad masses of the peasants do not get any medical treatment...The Ministry of Public Health is not a Ministry of Public Health for the people, so why not change the name to the Ministry of Urban Health.” Ibid., p. 271.

pursuing?

Mao's responded to the rightist offensive by pushing to initiate the Socialist Education Movement in 1962. In addition, the decision of the Chinese Communist Party to open up polemics in the early 1960s against the revisionist line that had emerged in the Soviet Union spurred the Socialist Education Movement and laid important groundwork for the Cultural Revolution. These polemics, concentrated in *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement* (a compilation of nine documents written under Mao's direction in 1963-64)²⁰ indirectly targeted top leaders of the CCP who were implementing similar revisionist policies.

In a September 1962 speech which set the tone for the Socialist Education Movement, Mao stressed that the class struggle would continue in China for a prolonged period of time. The Socialist Education Movement called for combining education with productive labor, rooting out corrupt cadre, and the revival of a socialist spirit among the masses and in the party. In many areas, poor and middle peasants were mobilized to reassert the primacy of collective farming over private plots. The advanced Dazhai commune was held up as a national model for agriculture. The Daqing oilfields, which had been opened up through self-sacrificing work and where the "3-1-2" system was being creatively employed, was a national model for industry.²¹

An important focus of the Socialist Education Movement was the People's Liberation Army. While military training continued at a high level, political consciousness and ideological education were given priority over technique. The *Quotations of Chairman Mao Tsetung* was first developed for use in the PLA in the early 1960s. After Peng Dehuai was removed and Lin Biao became Defense Minister in 1959, the trend towards a Soviet-style professional officer corps was reversed; officers' ranks and privileges were eventually eliminated. PLA units worked alongside the peasants on the communes and trained a large people's militia.

There was also sharp struggle over the question of whether China could build up its defense capacity by self-reliant effort, or whether it had to acquire advanced weaponry from the Soviet Union.²² In fact, socialist China was able to produce its own tanks, jets and naval vessels, and by 1964 was able to break the imperialist powers' monopoly on nuclear weapons.

However, Mao's initiatives in the early 1960s, with the exception of the campaign to place politics in command of the work of the PLA, were undermined at every turn by Liu, Deng and their network of revisionist officials in the party and government. In the cities, managers and administrators blocked efforts to stem the growing inequalities in the factories and educational system. In the countryside, Liu issued the "23 Directives," using his position as State Chairman to trump Mao's policies. Instead of mobilizing the

²⁰ <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/PGLtc.html>

²¹ Due to rightist opposition, the campaigns to Learn from Dazhai and Daqing could not be fully realized until the Cultural Revolution got underway.

²² In 1965, the Chief of Staff of the PLA, Luo Ruiqing, was replaced due to his insistence that a modern army could not be built without aid from the Soviet revisionists.

peasants to reinvigorate collective farming and criticize conservative rural party officials, Liu and Deng dispatched “work teams”-- outside cadres organized by higher party organs-- to protect these officials and block independent initiatives among the peasants. Battle lines were being drawn.

Confronted with this situation, Mao’s attention turned to the revisionist policies of high-ranking party leaders. This led directly to the launch of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Its goals were to overthrow those leaders of the party whose policies were leading China backward towards capitalism, and to transform and revolutionize people’s thinking and relationships with each other. This *revolution in socialist society* was an attempt—unprecedented anywhere or anytime—to mobilize and empower hundreds of millions of workers, peasants, youth, women and minority nationalities in order to stay on the long and difficult socialist road to communism.

Mao’s understanding of the necessity for class struggle in socialist society and his leadership of the Cultural Revolution constitute his most important contribution to the world revolutionary movement. Revolutionary movements and future socialist societies will have to address these questions if they are to realize their promise.

D. The Course of the Cultural Revolution

In May 1965, after an absence of 38 years, Mao reascended Mount Chingkang, the first revolutionary base area of the CCP in southern China. Alluding to historical events and literary themes of the past, this poem by Mao demonstrates his resolve to launch a new and victorious struggle for the hearts and minds of the Chinese people.

Reascending Chingkangshan

I have long aspired to reach for the clouds
And I again ascend Chingkangshan.
Coming from afar to view our old haunt,
I find new scenes replacing the old.
Everywhere orioles sing, swallows dart,
Streams babble
And the road mounts skyward.
Once Huangyangchieh²³ is passed
No other perilous place calls for a glance.

Wind and thunder are stirring,
Flags and banners are flying
Wherever men may live.
Thirty-eight years are fled
With a mere snap of the fingers.
We can clasp the moon in the Ninth Heaven²⁴

²³ One of five strategic passes in the area.

And seize turtles deep down in the Five Seas:
| We'll return amid triumphant song and laughter.
Nothing is hard in this world
If you dare to scale the heights.

Mao understood that debate and struggle in the cultural sphere could be an effective weapon in preparing the ground for political struggle. In November 1965, he commissioned an article by Yao Wenyuan criticizing “The Dismissal of Hai Jui.” This referred to a play written by a leading member of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee that implied that high officials rather than the people themselves were needed to solve the peasants’ problems, and allegorically attacked Mao as a modern-day emperor. Because the Beijing party was a stronghold of the revisionist forces, Yao’s article had to be published in Shanghai, where the Party Secretary, Ke Qingshi, was closely allied with Mao.

In February 1966, Peng Zeng, Mayor of Beijing and a leading proponent of the revisionist practices of the early 1960s, publicly attacked Yao’s article. In May, a statement of the Central Committee criticized Peng as an example of bourgeois elements who had infiltrated the party and government.

The first dazibaos—big character posters²⁵—appeared in Beijing. On May 25, a dazibao at Beijing University lambasted the university president and two close associates of Peng for suppressing political debate. Mao announced his support for the rebels’ dazibaos and called on millions of students at secondary schools, institutes and universities to join the Red Guards to “rebel against reactionaries.” The view of Mao and his supporters was that, in a socialist society, new generations have to experience the process of revolution themselves, to think through for themselves what kind of society they want, who opposes that vision, and how to struggle against those forces..

During the rest of 1966, over a million students, largely middle school students from other areas, were in Beijing at any given time. They rebelled against authoritarian teachers and a revisionist educational system that was geared to produce experts with low political consciousness. Rightist administrators and teachers were paraded in the streets with dunce caps and subjected to public criticism meetings and all-night “struggle sessions.”

Red Guard organizations changed the old imperial names of streets²⁶ and stores and searched homes, temples and churches for evidence of counter-revolutionary

²⁴ This refers to a famous poem from the Tang dynasty.

²⁵ “The big character poster was a very flexible, effective and convenient political instrument. All it took was some ink, some paper, a brush, and the ability to write. Even if a person could not write, he or she could always find somebody else to help write a poster.” Dazibaos were one of the “four bigs” employed during the Cultural Revolution. The others were daming (“great airing of opinions), dafang (great freedom), and dabianlun (great debate). Dongping Han, *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Educational Reforms and their Impact on China’s Rural Development*, 2000, pp. 59, 60.

²⁶ The street on which the Soviet embassy was located was renamed Anti-Revisionist Street, and the British colony of Hong Kong was renamed Expel-the-Imperialists City.

activities, hoarding wealth, and the practice of feudal customs. This was not mindless violence that was portrayed in the Western press, but a political movement to uproot the old ideas and customs of the exploiting classes. However, there were excesses, including serious physical attacks on people in relatively privileged positions, which Mao and others in the party leadership recognized and sought to correct.

In order to provide guidance to the unfolding mass upsurge, a nine-member Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG) was formed under Mao's leadership. It included Mao's secretary Chen Boda, Minister of Public Security Kang Sheng, Mao's wife Jiang Qing, and two leftists from Shanghai, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan. Together with Defense Minister Lin Biao and Premier Zhou Enlai, these forces made up the "Left Alliance" that led the early stages of the Cultural Revolution.

In the summer of 1966, State Chairman Liu Shaoqi, Party Secretary Deng Xiaoping and other high-ranking leaders of the party who were coming under fire by rebel Red Guard organizations dispatched work teams to universities and factories. These work teams organized sections of the masses to attack the rebels and stifled political debate for 50 days. They told students that "wall posters should not be put up in the streets," and that "meetings should not hinder work or studies." The work teams also organized "loyalist" Red Guard groups.²⁷

Mao returned to Beijing in August from an inspection trip in the provinces, which he often undertook prior to a major struggle in the party. The party leadership, under pressure from members of the CCRG, withdrew the work teams and renewed its support for the rebels. The "16 Point Decision" of August 8, 1966 issued by the party's Central Committee defined the principal target of the Cultural Revolution as party leaders taking the capitalist road—or "capitalist roaders." It went on sale in music shops, as part of a set of 33-rpm vinyl discs that included a studio recording of a *People's Daily* editorial titled, "Become Acquainted with the Sixteen Points and Put the Sixteen Points to Use."²⁸

In the fall, Mao and the CCRG encouraged rebel Red Guard organizations to "take Beijing to the rest of the country." Large groups of Red Guards fanned out to other cities and to the vast countryside to "exchange revolutionary experiences." A peasant from Liu Ling village in Shaanxi Province describes how the Cultural Revolution was brought to his village:

It was in the autumn of 1966 that the Red Guards came here.... They read quotations and told us about the Cultural Revolution in Beijing and Shanghai. Never before had we had so many strangers in the village. They asked us about our lives, they wanted to learn from us. They

²⁷ While most Red Guard organizations targeted revisionist authorities and feudal customs, rival groups of Red Guards, often children of high-ranking party cadre, organized themselves to defend their privileges and the positions of their parents. In many schools and campuses, sharp struggle broke out between revolutionary and "loyalist" Red Guard organizations.

²⁸ Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 2006, p. 92. This book contains some useful detail. However, it omits any discussion of the Cultural Revolution's achievements, and claims that the Cultural Revolution was an unnecessary upheaval characterized by "murder and mayhem" that led to the capitalist restoration under Deng Xiaoping.

asked us how we were managing things in the brigade.... We went on reading the quotations after they'd gone. We read, and compared the quotations with what was being done here at Liu Ling village, and came to the conclusion that a lot of things needed changing.²⁹

After news of the 16 Point Decision reached the villages of Shandong Province, east of Beijing, Red Guard organizations began to form in the middle schools. Soon thereafter, mass associations independent of local party control were organized by peasants, artists, and employees in factories, commercial establishments and even in the Public Security Bureau. In some villages, nearly all the adult population belonged to one association or another.³⁰ This process empowered peasants and workers to criticize the "local emperors" (revisionist party leaders) at mass meetings and through dazibaos plastered all over the villages.

At the same time, in Shanghai, China's industrial center, a powerful political force was stirring. The Workers General Headquarters (WGH) under the leadership of a young textile worker, Wang Hongwen, had built up strength in hundreds of factories criticizing revisionist management practices that stifled the initiative of the workers. In the course of several days in January 1967 known as the "January Storm,"³¹ these rebel workers seized power from Shanghai's party apparatus. The mass "struggle rally" at which the Shanghai party committee was brought down was the first to be shown live on television.³² In a desperate ploy to hold onto power, which was repeated throughout the Cultural Revolution, revisionist party leaders organized conservative factions among the workers to defend their positions and privileges. They also stirred up a wave of "economism," which attempted to sabotage the rebellion by granting tens of thousands of workers big wage increases and years of back pay.³³

After a short-lived experiment with a "commune" form of organization (modeled after the Paris Commune of 1871),³⁴ the Shanghai workers formed one of the first

²⁹ Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle, *China: The Revolution Continued*, 1970, pp. 106-107.

³⁰ Dongping Han, pp. 55-56.

³¹ *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution*, by Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun (1997) has a detailed description of the January Storm, but is marred by its misunderstanding of the important differences between the contending workers' organizations and the social transformations that took place during the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai.

³² MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, p. 165.

³³ A separate issue was the treatment of the temporary and contract workers, whose numbers expanded rapidly in the early 1960s as part of Liu Shaoqi's efforts to cut costs and maximize profit. These workers received no medical insurance, had no job security and were paid less than workers in the state enterprises. Due to the immediate need to focus on the task of seizing and reconstituting political power in Shanghai, their demands were not addressed until several years later. In 1971, many temporary workers were converted to permanent status, and differences between union and non-union members in medical and other welfare provisions were abolished. Perry and Li, pp. 100, 116.

³⁴ The Paris Commune called for democratically elected leaders subject to immediate popular recall, and for the abolition of a standing army. In his discussions with Zhang Chunqiao, a member of the CCRG from Shanghai, Mao rejected the commune model. He argued that the working class still needed an advanced political leadership in the form of a Communist Party, and

“revolutionary committees” composed of members of the workers’ mass organizations, revolutionary party cadre and political cadres of the People’s Liberation Army. The Shanghai Revolutionary Committee took charge of key government agencies and direction of industrial and transport work. Workers Propaganda Teams, which included members of the PLA, were dispatched to universities and schools and resolved factional disputes in factories. WGH-sponsored militia had branches in virtually every factory in Shanghai.³⁵

Revolutionary seizures of power took place in other parts of China throughout 1967, removing revisionist party officials in some areas, and putting them on the defensive in others. However, in many areas intense factional fighting developed, with a confusing array of “rebel forces” each claiming to support Mao and defend Mao Zedong Thought. After ultra-left and conservative forces alike raided PLA armories, tens of thousands of casualties resulted. In Wuhan, rightist army commanders violently suppressed rebel mass organizations and kidnapped members of the CCRG who were sent to resolve the crisis. These developments threatened to derail the Cultural Revolution and push the country into chaos.

Mao and the broad Left Alliance that was leading the Cultural Revolution called on the People’s Liberation Army to intervene and support the Left forces. In Wuhan, several divisions of the PLA surrounded the army mutineers and forced their surrender. In August 1967 many mass organizations were disbanded in an attempt to halt factional fighting.

By 1968, three-in-one revolutionary committees had been organized in all of the provinces, with the PLA playing an important role. The revolutionary committees helped reconstitute the party, bringing in new revolutionary activists, including large numbers of women, in the following years.³⁶ The number of CCP members grew from 17 million in 1962 to 28 million in 1973.

The initial upsurges of the Cultural Revolution, which brought tens of millions of people into political motion, cleared the way for path-breaking social transformations. Universities were opened up to workers and peasants. Women broke into skilled higher paid jobs in industry and into positions of leadership. Workers helped to manage factories, and cadre worked on shop floors. Doctors settled down in the countryside and trained 750,000 “barefoot doctors”--thereby narrowing the gap between urban and rural medical services. (See pages 23-51 for discussion of these transformations.)

In April 1969, the Ninth Congress of the CCP announced the consolidation of the victories of the first three years of the Cultural Revolution, upheld the expulsion of Liu Shaoqi from the party, and designated Defense Minister Lin Biao as Mao’s successor.

that a socialist country composed of federated communes could not survive in a world dominated by imperialism. Schram, p. 277-278. www.marxists.org

³⁵ Perry and Li, pp. 156, 162.

³⁶ In a speech in 1969, Mao placed emphasis on rectifying the party by the masses as it was being rebuilt: “Every branch needs to be rectified among the masses. They must go through the masses; not just a few Party members but the masses outside the Party must participate in meetings and in criticism.” “Talk at the First Plenum of the 9th Central Committee of the CCP,” Schram, p. 288.

However, this display of party unity obscured the development of deep political differences between Mao and Lin over a number of questions. Mao was especially concerned about the growing number of PLA commanders in the top levels of the party, and by Lin's promotion of a personality cult around Mao that was actually meant to promote Lin himself as another political "genius."³⁷

China's support for people's struggles around the world increased greatly during the Cultural Revolution. China sent billions of dollars in military aid and over 300,000 troops to North Vietnam to operate anti-aircraft batteries, build roads and perform logistical work that freed up North Vietnamese regiments to engage the U.S. military in the south. The People's Republic sent military aid and provided training to guerillas fighting against apartheid South Africa, the Portuguese colonies in Africa, neo-colonialist regimes in France's former colonies, and against the Zionist settler state of Israel.

China denounced the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and its expansionist aims. Millions of copies of the Red Book were distributed around the world, providing an introductory course to the strategy and tactics of the Chinese revolution and to Mao Zedong Thought.

In 1969, clashes between Soviet and Chinese forces on China's northern border, followed by ominous Soviet movements threatening the use of nuclear weapons against China, forced the CCP leadership to reassess its position of seeing the U.S. imperialists and Soviet social-imperialists as equally dangerous enemies. Mao and Zhou Enlai agreed that an "opening to the West" was necessary. Lin Biao, supported by a powerful group of generals and party leaders, opposed this new policy.

As Lin attempted to build up a factional network in the army to strengthen his hand, Mao took an inspection trip in the fall of 1971 to ensure the reliability of the regional military commanders. Realizing that he was about to lose power, Lin attempted to organize a coup d'etat. When this failed, he fled China and died in a plane crash in Mongolia.

In the wake of the traumatic "Lin Biao affair," an influential group of party leaders and military commanders³⁸ who had been demoted during the Cultural Revolution were brought back with the backing of Premier Zhou Enlai. This process culminated in a key turning point, the rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping, the "number two capitalist roader," in March 1973 and his appointment as Deputy Premier.

³⁷ As far back as 1966, Lin claimed that "Chairman Mao's sayings, works and revolutionary practice have shown that he is a great proletarian genius.... Every sentence of Chairman Mao's works is a truth, one sentence of his surpasses ten thousand of ours." In a private letter to Jiang Qing, Mao's responded, "I would never have thought that the few books I have written could have such magical powers." Jaap van Ginneken, *The Rise and Fall of Lin Piao*, 1977, pp. 61-63. Lin once said, "We must firmly implement the Chairman's instructions, whether we understand them or not." MacFarquhar and Schoenthals, p. 98. For a description of Zhang Chunqiao's opposition to Lin's attempt, at a 1970 Central Committee plenum, to insert a reference to Mao's genius in the party constitution, see *ibid.*, pp. 328-332.

³⁸ Several of these military commanders, including PLA Chief of Staff Yeh Chien-ying, led the military coup that ended the Cultural Revolution in 1976.

Over the next two years, Deng worked on a 10,000 word “General Program of Work for the Whole Party and the Whole Nation” that included restoring top-down management of enterprises, factory rules to push workers harder, reorienting teaching in the universities to train a new elite of specialists, and importing Western technology—in short, a program to overturn the revolutionary transformations of the Cultural Revolution.

Deng’s policies also included advocacy of the Three Worlds Theory. This called for a *strategic* entente with the Western imperialists and pro-Western “third world” countries to facilitate China’s economic growth. Mao, in contrast, upheld self-reliant economic development. He argued that *tactical* unity with the U.S. in some areas was necessary to deal with the Soviet threat to China, and opposed efforts to reduce support for revolutionary struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America.³⁹

Even though four leftists associated with Mao (Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen, Yao Wenyuan and Jiang Qing, the so-called “gang of four,”⁴⁰) received leading positions at the Tenth Congress of the CCP in 1973, the tide had shifted within the party. In factories, people’s communes and schools, the Cultural Revolution was under attack and the leftist forces were on the defensive.

Premier Zhou began to challenge the Maoist tenet of putting politics in command of enterprises, and led efforts to reinstitute the old system of entrance examinations for universities, which had been condemned as a bourgeois policy earlier in the Cultural Revolution.⁴¹ According to an active participant in the educational reforms at a university in Fujian Province, due to the renewed emphasis on admission exams, by 1975 at least half of the student body were the sons and daughters of urban cadre and intellectuals.⁴²

Nevertheless, there was considerable resistance to the rightist offensive. The Four and their supporters around the country were the most vocal and visible opponents. Dazibaos appeared in Beijing in 1974 defending the revolutionary committees as a vital achievement of the Cultural Revolution.⁴³ At a machine tools plant in Guangzhou, workers attacked the managers for relying solely on technical solutions without “mobilizing the spirit of the workers.”⁴⁴

By 1973, Mao had become more critical of Zhou, whose authority and prestige in the party was only second to that of Mao. Zhou’s espousal of the “four modernizations” along with Deng—which made economic development the primary task for the country—was in opposition to Mao’s view that *socialist* economic growth required bringing forward the political initiative of the masses of people to consciously direct production in

³⁹ See “Chinese Foreign Policy During the Maoist Era and Its Lessons for Today,” pp. 28-31.

⁴⁰ They were first referred to as a “gang of four” after Mao’s death and their arrest. Thus, we will refer to them as “the Four.”

⁴¹ Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Zhou Enlai: A Political Life*, 2006, pp. 276-77.

⁴² B. Michael Frolic, *Mao’s People: Sixteen Portraits of Life in Revolutionary China*, 1980, p. 85.

⁴³ In one dazibao, six mass representatives from the Beijing Municipal Revolutionary Committee asserted that the committee had not met in session for four years and that of the original 24 workers, only one remained on the committee. Leijonhufvud, p. 123.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

their interests, overcome social inequalities, and continue to wage class struggle against revisionist party leaders and their policies.⁴⁵

Zhou had also steered the nationwide campaign to “criticize Lin Biao and Confucius” into a campaign against ultra-leftism. Mao saw this as a direct attack on the Cultural Revolution and its supporters.⁴⁶ In the course of this campaign in 1973-74, the Four linked Confucius with Zhou, comparing Confucius’ defense of established authority with Zhou’s support for the rehabilitation of party leaders who had opposed the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁷

During these years, even while in declining health, Mao sought to consolidate the gains of the Cultural Revolution and prepare for the next round of struggle. Though he did not appear to have full confidence in the ability of the Four to assume leadership of the party and government, he generally supported them in their back-and-forth struggle with Deng and Zhou over the direction of Chinese society. With Mao’s backing, Deng was removed from power a second time, but made a rapid comeback.

A month after Mao’s death in September 1976, army commanders supported by Deng and the centrist Hua Guofeng staged a coup, first arresting the Four⁴⁸ and then proceeding to purge those members of the CCP who continued to uphold the political objectives and achievements of the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁹ This initiated an inexorable process of dismantling socialism and building a new form of capitalism with “socialist” trappings. According to Dongping Han, “The complete negation of the Cultural Revolution

⁴⁵ In 1974, Mao issued three directives concerning class struggle, stability and unity, and economic growth. When Deng tried to twist them so economic development became the main task, Mao insisted that class struggle was of primary importance and should be taken as the “key link.” Deng’s is reported to have replied, “How can we talk about class struggle every day?” Deng knew all too well against whom, and whose political program, class struggle was being waged.

⁴⁶ Barnouin and Yu, *Zhou Enlai*, pp. 301-303; Barnouin and Yu, *Chinese Foreign Policy During the Cultural Revolution*, 1998, pp. 35-37. In these books the authors describe the development of political differences between Mao and Zhou in the early 1970s.

⁴⁷ Barnouin and Yu, *Zhou Enlai*, p. 301; Han Suyin, *Eldest Son: Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China*, 1994, p. 395. While Mao was critical of Zhou in the early 1970s, especially in the area of foreign policy, he did not want to remove Zhou from power. Mao is reported to have opposed an attempt by Jiang Qing to launch an “eleventh line struggle” against Zhou in December 1973. Barnouin and Yu, p. 300.

⁴⁸ After showcase “trials” in 1980-1981, Zhang, Wang and Jiang received life sentences in prison, and Yao was sentenced to 20 years.

⁴⁹ In *China Winter: Workers, Mandarins and the Purge of the Gang of Four* (1981), Edoarda Masi, an Italian teacher at the Foreign Languages Institute in Shanghai during 1976 and 1977, reported on resistance to the coup by workers organizations and local militia. In early 1977, she visited a machine tool factory where the revolutionary committee had been purged and the workers’ productivity scores were kept on a large scoreboard. pp. 291-92. According to provincial radio broadcasts monitored abroad, strikes and attacks on party offices took place in some areas. *And Mao Makes Five*, ed. Raymond Lotta, 1978, p. 49.

following Deng Xiaoping's return to power in 1978 was like a quick deep frost on tender spring crops."⁵⁰

While the Western press raves about Dengist China's rapid economic growth and the development of a "new middle class" (composed of only 10% of the population), the bitter fruits of capitalist restoration can be seen today in the brutal exploitation of Chinese workers in plants owned by multinational corporations, the creation of an unemployed mass of 150 million former peasants who travel from city to city in search of work, the collapse of the rural health care system, the reappearance of female infanticide, and the fouling of air and water throughout the country. Chinese state-owned enterprises are also exporting capital, investing billions of dollars to grab control of oil and other natural resources in Africa and Latin America. And to project its power abroad, the government is rapidly building up a modern military.

E. Theoretical Underpinnings of the Cultural Revolution

The persistence of class struggle and the emergence of a new bourgeoisie under socialism

In the middle of the 20th century, the prevailing thinking in the international communist movement was that a capitalist class had to be anchored in the *private ownership* of the means of production. While Stalin claimed that by 1936—with the nationalization of industry and collectivization of agriculture—no exploiting classes existed in the Soviet Union,⁵¹ Mao recognized that class struggle would persist and intensify at key points in socialist society. As he pointed out in 1957 in *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*:

In China, although in the main socialist transformation has been completed with respect to the system of ownership...there are still remnants of the overthrown landlord and comprador classes, there is still a bourgeoisie, and the remolding of the petty bourgeoisie has only just started. The class struggle is by no means over. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the class struggle between the different political forces, and the class struggle in the ideological fields between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will continue to be long and tortuous and at times will even become very acute. The proletariat seeks to transform the world according to its own world outlook and so does the bourgeoisie. In this respect, the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, is still not really settled.⁵²

⁵⁰ Dongping Han, p. 157.

⁵¹ "On the Draft Constitution of the U.S.S.R." <http://www.marx2mao.com/Stalin/SC36.html>

⁵² www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5, Section VIII.

This theoretical perspective has immense political implications. A claim that exploiting classes have been abolished under socialism strongly implies that the main threat to socialism must be external (capitalist encirclement and aggression), and that internal opposition is not rooted in the contradictions among classes but rather in treachery or imperialist subversion. In contrast, Mao emphasized the internal dangers to socialism, and that these dangers must be addressed through political and ideological means.⁵³ These, of course, are very different from the approaches taken towards foreign agents, who are typically imprisoned or shot.

Mao's analysis led to the path-breaking understanding that, beyond the remnants of the old exploiting classes, the *contradictions in socialist society itself* give rise to new bourgeois elements, which can coalesce into a new bourgeoisie. This understanding was described by William Hinton based on his experience with the Chinese Revolution.

Socialism must be regarded as a transition from capitalism to communism (or in the case of China from new democracy to communism). As such it bears within it many contradictions, many inequalities that cannot be done away with overnight or even in the course of several years or several decades. These inequalities are inherited from the old society, such things as pay differentials between skilled and unskilled work and between mental and manual work, such things as the differences between the economic, educational, and cultural opportunities available in the city and in the countryside. As long as these inequalities exist they generate privilege, individualism, careerism and bourgeois ideology.... They can and do create new bourgeois individuals who gather as a new privileged elite and ultimately as a new exploiting class. Thus socialism can be peacefully transformed back into capitalism.⁵⁴

⁵³ Internal contradictions are, as a rule, the basis of change. Socialism is no exception to this central tenet of dialectics. In *On Contradiction*, Mao explained that materialist dialectics holds that "in order to understand the development of a thing we should study it internally and in its relations with other things; in other words, the development of things should be seen as their internal and necessary self-movement, while each thing in its movement is interrelated with and interacts on the things around it... [Materialist dialectics] holds that external causes become operative through internal causes. In a suitable environment an egg changes into a chicken, but no temperature can change a stone into a chicken, because each has a different basis." *SW* Vol. 1, 1937, pp. 313, 314. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/index

Denying the existence of internal contradictions leads to serious problems. Speaking on the experience of the Soviet Union, Mao asked: "Are there any contradictions in socialist society? Lenin once talked about this question and thought there were contradictions. But Stalin did not admit this for a long time. During Stalin's later life, people were neither allowed to speak ill of the society nor to criticize the party or the government. In fact, Stalin mistook contradictions among the people for those between ourselves and the enemy, and consequently regarded those who bad-mouthed [the party or government] or who spread gossip as enemies, thus wronging many people." "Speech at a CPC Cadres Meeting in Shanghai," March 20, 1957, *The Writings of Mao Zedong: 1949-1976, Volume II: January 1956-December 1957*, editors John Leung and Michael Kau, 1992, p. 465.

⁵⁴ Hinton, pp. 20-21.

Thus the birthmarks of the old society continue to be reproduced in new configurations in socialist society. There are still substantial disparities in decision making power, wealth (varying salaries and living conditions) and access to social resources such as education, culture and information.⁵⁵ This is the *material basis* for the development of new bourgeois forces in socialist society and within the Communist Party itself.

In order to make the transition from socialism to communism, these inequalities in political, economic and intellectual resources—these class differences--must be narrowed and eventually eliminated. This requires mass campaigns and political struggle that enable the masses of people to master all aspects of society and overcome the age-old difference between mental and manual labor. Only then can the communist goal of “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs” be fully realized.

Why the new bourgeoisie is concentrated in the Communist Party

In a country advancing on the socialist road, the Communist Party is the leading force in the state owned and collectively owned enterprises, and in the government at all levels. The decisive debates and struggle over economic development, foreign policy, education, culture and the direction of society as a whole take place in the party. Therefore, newly arisen bourgeois forces group themselves and aspire to high positions in the party.

The bourgeoisie in the party is in a position to advocate and implement policies that can, if not checked, pull the country off the socialist road. These revisionist policies defend and widen differences in wealth, decision making power and other social resources, and appeal to narrow self-interest, thereby creating a base of support among more privileged strata such as government administrators, managers, technicians and intellectuals.

Bourgeois elements in the party also promote political passivity and fight tooth and nail against campaigns that mobilize the masses of people to more directly and consciously determine the overall direction of socialist society. They assert that the class struggle is over both inside the party and in society as a whole, and that the main task is economic development of the productive forces. They then claim that revolutionary politics stands in the way of achieving these economic goals.

Thus, what defines the bourgeoisie in the party, as a class, is their concentration in leading positions in the party *and* a consolidated revisionist political line that has developed in opposition to a revolutionary line. If they are able to unite around a common political program and implement this program in significant sections of the

⁵⁵ At the core of these inequalities that continue to operate under socialism is the existence of “bourgeois right.” See page 77 for discussion of this important concept and why it must be restricted in order to keep on the socialist road.

government, the economy, the educational system, the armed forces and, most importantly throughout the party itself, they may be able to seize power and set up a new form of capitalism with socialist trappings. Hence, Maoists refer to this new bourgeoisie in the party as “capitalist roaders.”⁵⁶

Another important reason for the development of capitalist roaders in the Chinese Communist Party harkens back to the new democratic stage of the revolution. During the long years of struggle against Japanese and U.S. imperialism, large numbers of nationalists were attracted to communism and the CCP as the most effective way to liberate China from imperialism and feudalism, clearing the way to make it a prosperous and powerful country. China was hardly unique in this respect. In the first half of the twentieth century, many political movements seeking to liberate themselves from imperialism saw Marxism merge with nationalism of various kinds.

What largely distinguished the Chinese experience from that of other countries was Mao’s insistence that the struggle for national liberation was a way station on the path to socialism and communism. However, many who had initially joined the CCP did not have a thorough understanding of capitalism and lacked Mao’s determination to struggle for socialism, especially as it became increasingly clear as the 1950s and 1960s progressed how difficult that struggle would be.⁵⁷

Mao employed a policy of unity and struggle to win them over, but the goal of a powerful and prosperous China trumped many of these party members’ commitment to socialism. From the perspective of bourgeois nationalism, there was little wrong with one-man management, material incentives and reliance on advanced technology from

⁵⁶ An article that appeared in the theoretical journal *Study and Criticism* in 1976 discussed the nature of “capitalist roaders in power” such as Deng and Liu. “As individuals, they may not necessarily own capital, run factories and operate banks like the former capitalists, but their political line which energetically upholds the capitalist relations of production [including the inequalities that continue to exist in socialist society-ed.] reflects in a concentrated way the economic interests and political aspirations of the bourgeoisie as a whole.” In a prescient remark, the article points out that if they usurp the Party and state power, the bourgeoisie in the party “will change the nature of the socialist system of public ownership and openly restore the capitalist system. By then, capitalist roaders, big and small, will re-divide among themselves and in proportion to their capital and power, all the wealth created by the laboring people.” Chuang Lan, “Capitalist Roaders are Representatives of the Capitalist Relations of Production,” Lotta, pp. 371-372.

Around this time, Zhang Chunqiao recognized the need for more “works with depth that describe the struggle against the capitalist roaders inside the party in the era of the socialist revolution... If we don’t properly investigate what constitutes the distinctive characteristic of the struggle in the era of the socialist revolution, and the distinctive characteristic and essence of capitalist roaders inside the party, we will have great difficulty writing good works of quality devoted to this topic. Such works would not only be able to teach the people of today something, but also have an educational value for future generations.” MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, p. 433.

⁵⁷ One of their chief representatives was State Chairman Liu Shiaoqi, who in the 1950s advocated an extended period of new democracy before the collectivization of agriculture and the nationalization of small and medium-size enterprises was completed.

abroad if they contributed to economic growth. As the preeminent capitalist roader Deng Xiaoping said, "black cat, white cat, it makes no difference as long as it catches mice."

The restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union

Mao's path breaking understanding of the nature of socialist society and the danger of capitalist restoration in China was in large part due to his study of the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union, which still operated under the sign-board of socialism. This was not due to old pre-revolutionary remnants of the Russian bourgeoisie hiding and regrouping, biding their time and lying in wait for a good moment, and then making a grab for power. And it had not occurred as the result of an imperialist invasion, nor by external forces sneaking agents into the Soviet Union.

Instead, Khrushchev had organized a coup as the leader of a new capitalist class that had grown up within the CPSU, based on newly generated class privileges and a revisionist political line. This new bourgeoisie in the party was largely unrecognized, and grew without challenge until it could seize and consolidate its power in 1956 and 1957.

F. The Achievements of the Cultural Revolution

The many practical achievements of the Cultural Revolution deserve recognition as the most advanced forms of socialist transformation achieved in the world to date.⁵⁸ Below we describe these "socialist new things" in education, healthcare, culture, foreign policy, industry and agriculture. We also discuss in greater detail the advances in combating patriarchal authority and inequalities between women and men.

(1) Revolution in the Superstructure of Socialist Society

⁵⁸ Foreign friends of socialist China perhaps inevitably received a rosy view of the Cultural Revolution at the time. Leftist forces grouped around the so-called "gang of four" controlled publications such as *Peking Review* and *China Reconstructs*, provided an unbalanced picture of the strength of the leftist forces and the breadth and depth of the social transformations brought about by the Cultural Revolution. This skewing of perceptions of the Cultural Revolution also took place when foreign visitors were shown model workplaces, neighborhoods and communes.

Nevertheless, even though the revolutionary transformations of the Cultural Revolution were not universal and met stubborn resistance from revisionist forces, it is the politically advanced experiences of the Cultural Revolution that are most important to understand and uphold.

The Cultural Revolution was first and foremost a revolution in the political and ideological superstructure of Chinese society. One of the most important parts of this superstructure under socialism is the Communist Party. According to the “16 Point Decision” that became the political charter of the Cultural Revolution, its principal task was to overthrow “those within the Party who are in authority and taking the capitalist road.”⁵⁹

The Cultural Revolution moved into high gear in January 1967 with a seizure of power from below in Shanghai. In the plants, neighborhoods and at the city-wide level in Shanghai and many other cities, rebel workers criticized and replaced revisionist party officials with their own representatives. Through revolutionary committees, made up of representatives of the mass organizations of workers, revolutionary party cadre and political cadre of the People’s Liberation Army, millions of people began to play a more direct role in economic and state affairs. Likewise, revolutionary committees were established in many areas of the countryside based on self-organized mass associations of peasants and workers in local factories and shops.

Mao and the revolutionary forces in the party advanced other methods for overcoming the power inequalities between full-time government officials and party cadre and the masses of workers and peasants. While increasing numbers of peasants attended universities and agricultural colleges, May 7 Cadre Schools were set up in the countryside. All government officials and full-time party cadre were to be rotated through these schools, where they would do manual labor, live simply, and engage in intensive political study. Cadre returned to their work units after completing courses lasting six months to one year. According to one estimate, more than three million cadre attended these schools in their first year of existence.⁶⁰ Despite the wide availability of cadre schools, there were often more applicants than accommodations.⁶¹

As important as the political tasks of the Cultural Revolution were, the ideological objective—transformations in people’s thinking about the world and themselves—was even more fundamental. As Mao explained:

The struggle against the capitalist roaders in the Party is the principal task, but not the object. The object is to solve the problem of world outlook and eradicate revisionism... If world outlook is not reformed, although two thousand capitalist roaders are removed in the current great cultural revolution, four thousand may appear next time.⁶²

⁵⁹ *Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, 11th Plenum of the 8th Central Committee, August 8, 1966. http://www.etext.org/Politics/MIM/classics/mao/cpc/cc_res_11p.html

⁶⁰ Meisner, pp. 371-372.

⁶¹ Ruth Gamberg, *Red and Expert: Education in the People’s Republic of China*, 1977, p. 233.

⁶² A Talk by Chairman Mao with a Foreign [Albanian] Military Delegation, August 1967.

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Revolutionary Culture

Because it springs from people's hearts, minds and imaginations and reaches people in ways that politics does not, culture is a powerful weapon for maintaining the status quo or for transforming society. Thus, the call of the Cultural Revolution to criticize the "Four Olds"—Confucian and bourgeois ideology, culture, customs and habits--cleared the way for a multi-media explosion of music, plays, ballets, paintings, short stories and poetry that served the building of socialism. These new cultural works were based on the rich life experiences of China's workers and peasants, the "laobaixing," and extolled work for the common good.

In order to reach an audience of several hundred million semi-literate workers and peasants, the emphasis was on the visual arts, especially cinematic and theatrical productions. In addition, the new encouragement given to nonliterary culture led to a revival of folk arts, especially in the minority nationality areas.

Referring to the state of culture prior to the Cultural Revolution, especially the Beijing Operas based on imperial court dramas that exalted the wealthy and powerful, Mao made the comment that "the Ministry of Culture should be renamed the Ministry of Emperors, Kings, Generals and Ministers, the Ministry of Talents and Beauties or the Ministry of Foreign Mummies."

In order to create new dramas with socialist content, artists developed "8 Model Works," operas and ballets of high quality that in many cases used Western wind and string instruments. These musical works portrayed scenes from the period of the Chinese revolution, featuring heroic characters many of who were literally breaking their chains. One of these model works was the hugely popular ballet "The Red Detachment of Women," in which a slave girl runs away to join a newly organized women's detachment of the Red Army. Many of these revolutionary operas and ballets had strong, independent leading women characters who challenged sexist stereotypes of what they could accomplish.

The concept of "model works" in the performing arts has been a controversial one. While they limited artistic creativity and variety in some ways, these model works served to set a new direction in the performing arts by their class stand--putting workers and peasants on center stage.⁶³ A Chinese scholar who was living in Gao Village in Jiangxi Province during the Cultural Revolution writes:

⁶³ According to the program for an exhibition in Germany in 2001: "We often hear that the music of the Cultural Revolution was monolithic—that people were allowed to perform only the same 'eight model operas' throughout the period. While this characterization is partly true, only a few years into the Cultural Revolution, eighteen works were officially designated as models...in their various incarnations as Beijing operas, local opera adaptations, ballets, symphonies, concertos, chamber music, and choral arrangements—which constituted a staple of the Cultural Revolution musical diet. Musical composition and performance collectives adapted and readapted the model works in a variety of formats, a practice common throughout much Chinese musical history." "Rethinking Cultural Revolution Culture," www.sino.uni.heidelberg.de/conf/propaganda/musik

The rural villagers, for the first time, organized theater troupes and put on performances that incorporated the contents and structure of the eight model Peking operas with local language and music. The villagers not only entertained themselves but also learned how to read and write by getting into the texts and plays. And they organized sports meets and held matches with other villages. All these activities gave the villagers an opportunity to meet, communicate, fall in love. These activities gave them a sense of discipline and organization and created a public sphere where meetings and communications went beyond the traditional household and village clans. This had never happened before and it has never happened since.⁶⁴

Professional performers from the cities also formed troupes that traveled widely, learning more about their countrymen and women than they had at any other time in their lives. A woman describes the tours of her parents—who came from a renowned national theatre—to factories, mines and remote villages:

My parents' passionate belief in ordinary people, and their sincere efforts to reform themselves into revolutionary artists, deserving of the working class's trust, remain among my most prized impressions from the time I spent with them at the dinner table.... It was the responsibility of socialist artists to be accepted by the ordinary folk, for only this approval could qualify them to depict the latter's revolutionary acts on stage.⁶⁵

In the fine arts, China held four national exhibitions between 1972 and 1975. In Beijing they attracted an audience of 7.8 million, a scale never reached before the Cultural Revolution. Sixty five per cent of the exhibited works were created by workers, peasants and other amateurs from all over China. They included oil painting, watercolor painting, sculpture, picture storybook painting, charcoal painting and paper cuts.⁶⁶

Myriad forms of journalism, official and unofficial alike, sprouted during the Cultural Revolution. There were 542 official magazines and journals and 182 newspapers in circulation throughout China. More than 10,000 unofficial newspapers and pamphlets were published by the “laobaixing,” with 900 publications in Beijing alone.⁶⁷ The dazibaos that were plastered on the walls of streets, factories and schools were the antithesis of a tightly state-controlled media. They allowed millions to debate and express themselves on an unprecedented scale.

Common Western characterizations of the struggle against the “Four Olds” during the Cultural Revolution rely on photographs of Red Guards burning old books and destroying religious temples and historical relics. While incidents such as these took place in some cities, the government stepped in to try to protect cultural relics from

⁶⁴ Mobo Gao, “Debating the Cultural Revolution: Do We Only Know What We Believe?” *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 2002, pp. 427-428. See also *Gao Village*, pp. 162-164 on cultural activities and sports in his village.

⁶⁵ *Some of Us; Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era*, eds. Xueping Zhong, Wang Zheng and Bai Di, 2001, p. 80.

⁶⁶ Mobo Gao, “Debating the Cultural Revolution”, p. 429.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

destruction.⁶⁸ According to a woman who lived in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution, her neighborhood library had a variety of literature from the West. Recent editions of books had brief introductions which provided a political context and discussion of the author's viewpoint. Feudal literature was on the shelves in order to help readers learn about the old society.⁶⁹

There are also widespread misconceptions about the destruction of monasteries in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution. These monasteries were run by lamas who, with feudal landlords, exploited millions of serfs chained to the land. It was ex-serfs themselves who destroyed idols, prayer wheels, drums made of human skin and other symbols of their oppression that were housed in the monasteries. Later in the Cultural Revolution, some monasteries were restored so they could serve as religious shrines and museums that exhibited relics from the bitter past.

During the Cultural Revolution, archaeological excavations produced new discoveries of Lantian Man and Peking Man (c. 600,000-400,000 years ago) and bronzes, ceramics and other artifacts from ancient dynasties.⁷⁰ When foreign visitors saw such discoveries or the Ming Tombs outside Beijing, they were told that these great artistic achievements were built with the sweat of the common people, and now the common people finally had the right to enjoy them.

Education: "Red and Expert"

In pre-revolutionary China, education was the preserve of the feudal landlords and big capitalists, from whom a handful of "scholars" would be chosen as government officials. The scholars' long fingernails symbolized their disdain for manual work of any kind. In 1949, 85% of the people, 95% in the rural areas, could not read or write.

As the Red Army successively fought and defeated the Japanese and Guomindang armies led by Jiang Kai-shek, one of its highest priorities was setting up literacy classes in the newly liberated areas. Mass literacy campaigns in the cities and countryside were conducted throughout the 1950s. However, rote learning was still the norm in classrooms, since the teachers had been trained in the old society. The teacher was the absolute authority. Teachers lectured and wrote on the board; students copied and memorized the material. In higher education, as late as 1958, more than 90% of the professors had been trained in the old society or in the West.⁷¹

In the early 1960s, the political line of the revisionists in education served their

⁶⁸ In May 1967, the CCP Central Committee issued a document calling for the protection of traditional cultural institutions and relics. Ibid., p. 426.

⁶⁹ Zhang Zhen in *Some of Us*, p. 171.

⁷⁰ Some of these finds, with commentary about the slave and feudal societies in which they were created, were exhibited at galleries in Washington D.C. and Kansas City in 1975.

⁷¹ Ruth Gamberg, *Red and Expert: Education in the People's Republic of China*, 1977, p. 230.

program of strengthening the power of factory managers, technical experts and government officials to modernize the country. Building up a well-trained core of experts, regardless of their political outlook, took priority over developing the knowledge and skills of millions of workers and peasants. Important aspects of feudal and bourgeois systems of education were maintained, such as utilizing nationwide admission tests to determine who would go on to the next level of schooling, thereby excluding most workers' and peasants' children. Resources were concentrated on a few "key schools" to train the new urban elite

Education in the countryside was badly underfunded, and the few workers and peasants who received a higher education rarely returned to their communities.⁷² Students were driven to study for high marks in order to seek personal fame and high positions.⁷³

In contrast, the educational policies of the Cultural Revolution had the goal of producing graduates who were both "red and expert." Students were expected to gain knowledge and skills that could be used to solve society's pressing problems. A second goal was to make more educational opportunities available to working class and peasant children. Third, a system of mass education was developed so that primary or middle school graduates would continue their educations throughout their adult lives. The last and perhaps most important objective was to provide political education. During the Cultural Revolution, the understanding was that a student must first have the idea of serving the Chinese people. Then she or he would work hard to develop the ability to do so.

During the years of the Cultural Revolution there was a vast expansion of education in the countryside, where 80% of the people lived. Since primary education was already universal in the cities, the goal was to introduce at least five years of primary schooling in the rural areas. State education funds were redirected to the countryside, so that primary school enrollment in rural areas increased from 116 million to 150 million from 1966 to 1976. Educated local villagers were recruited as "barefoot teachers" to teach in new schools built by the villagers themselves.⁷⁴ Middle school enrollment rose from 15 million to 58 million as new middle schools were built or added to primary schools.⁷⁵ In many of these schools, representatives of peasants' and workers'

⁷² In one large county in Shandong Province, of the 1600 students who graduated from high school between 1953 and 1965, few returned to their villages, and none of those who went to college returned. Dongping Han, pp. 28-29.

⁷³ The method of "surprise attacks" and trick questions in examinations that was used to instill fear in students was one of the most oppressive features of the feudal and revisionist educational systems.

⁷⁴ Mobo Gao, *Gao Village*, pp. 103-107, 159-161. The author, from a poor peasant family, was recruited from his village to be a primary and middle school teacher from 1969 to 1973. He was then selected to attend Xiamen University.

⁷⁵ Meisner, p. 362.

associations entered the schools to provide educational leadership and practical advice to students and teachers.⁷⁶

Special efforts were made to develop the educational systems in the remote national minority areas, composing 6% of China's population. Schools and teacher training institutes had to start almost from scratch in some areas in the 1950s. By the early 1970s, the vast majority of youth were in schools, where they studied their native languages, music, crafts and customs alongside a regular curriculum. At the same time, minority cultures were popularized among the 94% who are Han in schools, films and on TV shows in order to combat Han chauvinism.⁷⁷

During a trip in 1971 through China, the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS) visited schools in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou and Xian.⁷⁸ In a Beijing primary school, the younger children had five basic courses: politics, Chinese language, mathematics, sports, and art and culture. The students did not just recite lessons, but asked questions and attempted to solve practical problems together. In their sports classes, winning was not emphasized; at an early age students learned the principle of "friendship first, competition second." Children who were falling behind received extra assistance from their teachers and fellow students. Every student could learn. Their potential just had to be cultivated.

Particularly in the lower grades, many lessons consisted of stories of heroines and heroes of majority and minority nationalities, children and adults, workers, peasants and soldiers doing noble and realizable deeds. At a combined primary and middle school, the CCAS delegation reported that:

We were surprised to find a sixth-grade reading class using as a text *Rent Collection Courtyard*, a series of articles about life in the old society. It was a new text, published during the Cultural Revolution. In a fourth-grade politics class, we heard the teacher discussing imperialism with her students. The lesson for the day was that United States imperialism was the leading enemy of Asian peoples and all peoples of the world. She gave an account of the Korean War and of two decades of American aggression in Southeast Asia.⁷⁹

The children also worked in school workshops. Groups of older children used stamping and electroplating machines to make parts for oil filters. The teachers explained to the visitors that learning facts and theory in the classroom and then applying them in the workshops helped the children to learn.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Dongping Han, pp. 107-112. The author conducted a study of Cultural Revolution educational reforms in a county of 800,000 people in Shandong Province.

⁷⁷ Gamberg, pp. 51-55.

⁷⁸ While foreign delegations were often sent to visit model schools where educational transformations were most advanced, these schools' teaching methods and structure provide valuable insights into the changes that were being made in schools nationwide.

⁷⁹ *China! Inside the People's Republic*, by the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS) 1972, p. 203.

⁸⁰ See Gamberg, pp. 92-97 for a description of children at work in a Nanjing primary school.

Textbooks, too, were changed during the Cultural Revolution. Districts experimented with writings their own textbooks, relating them to local problems and conditions. For example, schoolchildren in Nanjing used a book about the recently completed Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge. Instead of professional administrators, schools were governed by revolutionary committees composed of students, teachers, neighborhood people, workers propaganda team members and members of the PLA.⁸¹

Before the Cultural Revolution, primary school graduates had to take entrance examinations to be admitted to middle school, institutionalizing a tracking system. A few elite schools took the children with the highest scores, usually from non-working class families, while those with low scores had to leave school. The Cultural Revolution abolished this system. All children could receive a middle school education, and each middle school had a mixture of students with different abilities and family backgrounds.

At the middle schools these American scholars visited, middle school course offerings were similar: Chinese language and literature, math, basic agricultural and industrial knowledge,⁸² physical education and military training, revolutionary art and culture, history-geography, and politics, including the study of Mao Zedong Thought and Marxism-Leninism. Often, the material studied in English and Chinese literature classes would be about political affairs.⁸³

A combination of open and closed book exams, along with evaluations by teachers, fellow students and the students themselves, was used to test how students were progressing.⁸⁴ In addition, most middle school students in Beijing spent one month a year learning in a school workshop or in a factory outside the school, as well as one month working in an agricultural brigade. During these periods, the students read and discussed scientific books related to the work they were doing.⁸⁵

In study and work, individual and collective creativity was encouraged. While it was understood that students had different abilities, creativity was not seen as only individual. Rather the view was that it comes from the combined intelligence and cooperative efforts of many people.

This course of study and work graduated middle school students ready to contribute to socialist society. Of the 1970 graduates of one Beijing middle school, 60% started working in factories, 30% went to the countryside to work in small factories, health clinics, schools or in the fields, around 10% joined the army, and some went on to study at universities or technical institutes.

No classes were held in the universities in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution because of political turmoil and due to the effort to enable students to take

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 77-78.

⁸² In Jimo Country, Shandong Province, physics textbooks included theoretical material about thermodynamics and magnetic fields, as well as the application of these theories to the real world of diesel engines, electric motors and water pumps. Dongping Han, p. 114.

⁸³ Gamberg, see pp. 131-38 on school curricula during the Cultural Revolution; CCAS, p. 211; and Dongping Han, pp. 112-114.

⁸⁴ Gamberg, pp. 147-153.

⁸⁵ CCAS, p. 212.

part in political movements at their schools and in other parts of the country. When the schools reopened, they scrapped the old nationwide university admissions examination. Instead of taking senior middle school students in their graduation year, applicants were selected from among outstanding young workers, peasants and soldiers with two or more years of practical work behind them. Each province, district, city, factory and commune received a quota of applicants to fill. Then university admission committees made the final selections based on extensive interviews.

When Tsinghua University in Beijing reopened in June 1970, 45% of the students were selected by factories, 40% by the rural communes, and 15% by the PLA. Before the Cultural Revolution, 60% of the students were of non-working class origin. It was expected that these “worker-peasant-soldier students” would be more mature, more motivated, and have greater knowledge of the pressing problems of Chinese society. For students who hadn’t graduated from senior middle school, a special half-year course was provided before they began the regular program at Beijing University.⁸⁶

At the new socialist universities, the course of study was shortened to two or three years. They had three faculties—arts, sciences and languages. In addition to the familiar college-level subjects with newly designed courses, political study and discussion was built into the curriculum. It was particularly important to keep politics in command of the universities so that their graduates, the most highly educated members of Chinese society, would not develop into a new bourgeois intellectual elite.

Teaching methods also changed radically. According to one professor, the old “injection method,” through which “we thought we could inject knowledge into students like serum into a patient,” was replaced by self-study and classroom discussion. One student commented that while books are important, “the more important thing is for us... to learn to think by ourselves, to use our own brains. Otherwise we will not be able to understand the real meaning of theories and their connection to practice, and we will not be able to solve the problems we encounter.”⁸⁷

Just as in the middle schools, work was incorporated into university courses of study. Beijing University had its own pharmaceutical factory, where students of organic chemistry and biochemistry were experimenting with and producing medicines. The factory also ran a two to three week course for workers from Beijing factories. After a visit to China in 1971, William Hinton reported that

Some engineering schools have in effect been dissolved and merged with nearby plants and design units so that students, teachers, engineers, draftsmen, workers, and technicians rotate through what can be called urban production communes, producing, learning and creating in turn, and then spinning off production teams capable of setting up new producing and learning communes. Just as in the rural communes, much emphasis is placed on the use of advanced workers and engineers in production as teachers in their special fields. These become part-time teachers on a regular basis.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Gamberg, p. 67.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

⁸⁸ *Turning Point in China*, pp. 99-100.

Some technical institutes moved out of the cities altogether. For example, mining schools were moved to mining areas where students and faculty could combine theory with practice, work with and learn from the miners, and provide them with theoretical knowledge.⁸⁹

The Cultural Revolution also brought about changes in the administration of the universities. Workers and members of the PLA were assigned to the universities in order to ensure that students would not study in isolation and acquire knowledge that was irrelevant to the needs of the Chinese people. Students also served on the revolutionary committees that, together with workers, soldiers, professors and professional educators, administered the universities.⁹⁰

Another important question was the political consciousness and worldview of the teachers and professors. They were challenged to question what they taught and the methods they used, and to accept criticism from their students. And they had to combine theory with practice. At one teachers' college in Shanghai, the professors divided their time equally between teaching, research and physical work in factories or the countryside. In teaching colleges' second year, the study of pedagogy was combined with practice teaching in middle schools for a minimum of eight weeks. Once student teachers graduated, they often served as apprentices to more experienced teachers, a system that produced a stream of well-prepared new teachers.⁹¹

Both newly trained teachers and veteran teachers who had felt suffocated by traditional teaching practices found their voices during these years. In the dozens of volumes of debates about education reforms published in different provinces during the Cultural Revolution, the most vocal condemnations of the old teaching methods came from teachers, and the most thoroughgoing proposals for changes were also made by teachers.⁹²

Education was not limited to the schools, but was viewed as an ongoing process of raising one's cultural level, technical competence and political consciousness throughout adult life. One Canadian observer wrote about the varied arrangements for mass education during the Cultural Revolution:

There are study groups at workplaces and in neighborhoods that focus on the immediate problems of the group and on political issues. There are spare-time courses, part-work, part-study courses, correspondence and radio courses, and full-time workers' colleges and peasants' colleges offering programs in general "cultural knowledge" and technical skills.

A number of factories and communes she visited had their own libraries, and some advanced workers in Shanghai were engaged in studying Marxist philosophy and

⁸⁹ CCAS, p. 147.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 224-27.

⁹¹ Gamberg, pp. 236-40.

⁹² Dongping Han, pp. 117-119.

determining how to apply it to practical problems they faced in their plants, as well as to political issues in their work units.⁹³

In the early 1970s, a sharp struggle broke out among educators and within the party over whether to preserve the new system of education pioneered by the Cultural Revolution.⁹⁴ In the film “Breaking With Old Ideas,” released in 1975, the two opposing lines were sharply presented. The first struggle was whether to build a new agricultural college in the countryside or the city, followed by the question of whether to admit peasants and workers with limited education or to require passing traditional exams. The film also featured the students’ demands for a curriculum that combined scientific knowledge, production skills and the development of political consciousness --to become red and expert-- so they could return to serve their communes and factories.⁹⁵

The significance of these socialist educational policies was underscored by the restoration of pre-Cultural Revolution practices after Mao’s death. In 1977, the National College and University Entrance Exam was reinstated. According to one scholar, the extreme emphasis on standardized tests and curricula in the middle schools that did not fit the needs of rural people produced a drop-out rate of over 80% in some provinces during the early 1980s.⁹⁶ During these years, large numbers of junior and senior middle schools were closed in the name of “raising standards.”⁹⁷

Collective Values and Internationalism

In all of the arenas of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese people were called on to reject narrow self-interest and embrace their collective interests. The story of Lei Feng, a young soldier who distinguished himself with ordinary acts of courage and devotion to his fellow soldiers and the masses, as well as the “Three Good Old Articles,”⁹⁸ were essential parts of people’s political and moral education. “Serve the people” was more than a slogan. During the years of the Cultural Revolution, workers rejected material incentives, students turned away from chasing privileged careers to

⁹³ Gamberg, pp. 271-82.

⁹⁴ Beginning in 1972, Premier Zhou Enlai led efforts to reinstitute the old system of entrance examinations for senior middle school students applying to universities. Barnouin and Hu, *Zhou Enlai: A Political Life*, 2006, p. 277.

⁹⁵ “Breaking With Old Ideas” is available at www.archive.org/details/Breaking_With_Old_Ideas

⁹⁶ Jing Ling, *Education in Post-Mao China*, 1993, pp. xiii, 27.

⁹⁷ In 1980 alone, 23,700 middle schools were closed, affecting 14 million students. Mobo Gao, *Gao Village*, p. 114. In Jimo County, Shandong, the number of high schools dropped from 89 in 1977 to 8 in 1987. Dongping Han, p. 166.

⁹⁸ These were tributes to people who died in the service of others—the Canadian surgeon Norman Bethune who died operating on Red soldiers in the 1930s, an army charcoal burner in “Serve the People,” and “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains.” The latter was based on an old Chinese folk tale in which an old man removes two mountains in front of his house with a hoe; Mao urged the Chinese people to remove the two mountains of imperialism and feudalism from their backs in the same way.

integrate their education with the lives of workers and peasants, and doctors left the cities and settled in the countryside.

Political study was a part of daily life in factories, farms, schools and the military using a variety of materials. The Red Book, which the Western press pictured being waved at mass rallies like little Bibles, was used widely. First developed for use in the People's Liberation Army, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* introduced hundreds of millions of people to Marxism-Leninism and Mao's political thinking. This 312-page pocket-sized book contained sections of Mao's writing on areas such as classes and class struggle, socialism and communism, the people's army, the mass line, investigation and study, and culture and art. In addition, 86 million copies of Mao's *Selected Works* were printed in one year alone, and study of the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin promoted deeper political education.

An internationalist spirit and support for people's struggles around the world was a significant part of the Cultural Revolution. Massive rallies were held in 1968 to support the students and workers in France and the Black liberation movement in the U.S. in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. At demonstrations in support of the Vietnamese war of liberation, pictures of Mao and Ho Chi Minh together were common. According to one scholar, the call to "resist America and assist Vietnam" penetrated into every cell of Chinese society.⁹⁹

Visitors to China during the Cultural Revolution were struck by the number of times workers and peasants would speak about how their work was in service of the world revolution. A veteran woman worker interviewed at the Red Flag Embroidery Factory said, "We should try to do our job well. We have liberation, but the world's women do not have liberation yet. We should work to help them get liberation."¹⁰⁰

During a visit to Nanjing in 1971, the CCAS delegation saw a long and complicated dance skit about African workers:

The young Chinese boys and girls wore dark brown tights and sweaters and makeup, and for music they had huge bongo drums and flutes. The story was of workers exploited on a plantation, the owner often beats his workers and one dies of a very severe beating. The others, enraged, rise up against the owner and drive him away. In this way the 'fighting back' spirit of the oppressed peoples is constantly portrayed and admired...It turned out that there had been a group of Tanzanians who visited China and performed for cultural circles. The Chinese dancers learned the movements and rhythm, then popularized them. From this, each local group had developed its own variations on an African theme.¹⁰¹

At the government level, during the years of the Cultural Revolution the Chinese Communist Party intensified its criticisms of the Soviet revisionists, who were promoting a "peaceful road to socialism" and denying support to revolutionary movements in many parts of the world. In 1968, the CCP strongly opposed the Soviet Union's brutal invasion

⁹⁹ Chen Jian, "China and the Vietnam Wars," in Peter Lowe, *The Vietnam War*, 1998, p. 167.

¹⁰⁰ Janet Goldwasser and Stuart Dowty, *Huan-Ying: Workers' China*, 1975, p. 144..

¹⁰¹ CCAS, p. 251.

of Czechoslovakia. These ongoing polemics, the sharp struggle to criticize and remove revisionists lodged in the CCP, and the social transformations of the Cultural Revolution all inspired young revolutionaries in a number of countries to break with pro-Soviet parties that had become serious obstacles to the development of revolutionary movements.¹⁰²

In countries such as India, the Philippines and Turkey, new communist parties based on Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought adopted the strategy of people's war and raised mass struggles to new heights. In the U.S. a number of Maoist organizations were formed, including the Revolutionary Union, which became the Revolutionary Communist Party in 1975.

(2) The Liberation of Women

During the Cultural Revolution women made substantial gains. Many broke into higher-paying jobs in industry, developed as political leaders, challenged ideas of women's inferiority, and began to dig up the Confucian-patriarchal roots of women's oppression in China. But to understand how far the liberation of women had come, and how far it still had to go, it is necessary to refer back to the pre-Liberation period.

According to Confucian doctrine, men were respected, women were despised. Women had no economic or political rights; all but a few women from wealthy families were denied education; and they were subordinated to their fathers, husbands, brothers and in-laws. The brutal custom of foot binding ensured the physical and economic dependence of women on men. Forced marriages of young girls, wife beating and rape by landlords were accepted practices. According to an old folk saying, "A wife married is like a pony bought—I'll ride her and whip her as I like." Peasant women were slaves of slaves.

The victory of the revolution in 1949 ushered in a new era for China's women. In the land reform campaign of the early 1950s, Women's Associations¹⁰³ encouraged peasant women to lift their heads and "speak bitterness" about their treatment at the hands of big landlords. Tens of millions of women received their own share of land and

¹⁰² For a fuller discussion of these developments, see pp. 11-19 of "Chinese Foreign Policy During the Maoist Era and its Lessons for Today."

¹⁰³ As early as 1922, the Chinese Communist Party had established a Women's Department to help organize and lead women in revolutionary political activity. One of the first tasks undertaken by the Red Army when it entered an unorganized village was to form a Women's Association. In the liberated areas that were established in the 1930s and 40s, Women's Associations organized peasant women to spin cloth, sew clothes and shoes, serve as nurses, and to become village-based guerilla fighters. The work of the Women's Associations included organizing political study groups, and opposition to wife-beating, child marriage and in favor of divorce rights. *Women in China*, ed. Marilyn Young, 1973, pp. 73-87, 190-191. In *Fanshen*, William Hinton described the work of the Women's Association in Long Bow village, Shanxi Province, when it was still occupied by the GMD in the late 1940s. pp. 157-60.

left the household to work for the first time. The literacy rate for girls and women rose sharply as more schools were built. Prostitution was eliminated in a short period of time. New ideas of socialist equality challenged the traditional views of women's inferior status. As one woman described it, "It was as though not only their feet but their minds had been bound."¹⁰⁴

The Marriage Law passed by the People's Republic in 1950 prohibited forced marriage and marriage of young girls, bride prices, domestic abuse, and gave women the right of divorce. When these reforms ran into resistance from male peasants, workers and party cadre, the CCP launched a mass campaign in 1953 to implement the Marriage Law. Still there were limited gains, especially in the countryside where patriarchal customs were deeply rooted. Divorce, for example, was not easy to obtain when the husband's family had paid a steep bride price for their new daughter-in-law.

In 1958-59, the Great Leap Forward brought millions more women out of the home and into the labor force. On the people's communes, networks of nurseries and kindergartens were built to enable women to work in the fields and on construction projects. As women joined the workforce with the support of local Women's Associations, more women became leaders of their production teams and were recruited into the party.

Ten years after Liberation, great progress had been made by Chinese women as a direct result of the socialist transformation of Chinese society. At the same time, the prevailing belief in the CCP was that the full participation of women in the labor force was *the* key ingredient for attaining equality between women and men. This conception underestimated the continuing strength of patriarchal ideology embedded in the family and the social and economic inequalities between men and women that still existed in socialist society. Many still believed that men were more capable of difficult work and quicker to learn than women. In industry, the majority of women worked in lower paying jobs such as textiles and in "street industry," small shops where women did not receive the same wages and benefits as the mostly male workforce in state-owned factories. In agriculture, the work-point system, which determined income received by peasants, favored the job categories such as tractor drivers and construction workers usually occupied by men. In many cases, peasant women did not receive the same work-points as men doing the same jobs.

Of great importance, the traditional Chinese family was still intact in most respects, particularly in the countryside. Household work was still mainly women's work. Thus, women worked the "double shift" familiar to working women all over the world—doing the cooking, cleaning, shopping, sewing clothes and child-rearing that was extremely laborious and time-consuming in China at the time. Responsibility for household work was a major impediment to the full participation of women in political

¹⁰⁴ Goldwasser and Dowty, p. 140.

life and to their development as leaders in their workplaces, neighborhoods and in society as a whole.¹⁰⁵

With its egalitarian thrust and emphasis on the role of ideology, the Cultural Revolution provided favorable conditions for challenges to male supremacy in all areas of society.¹⁰⁶ The early upsurges of the Cultural Revolution drew women, especially young women, into political life in unprecedented ways:

Freed from family control, young women Red Guards moved across the landscape more widely and in greater numbers than at any time in Chinese history. Like their male counterparts, they were encouraged to challenge parents, teachers and officials, and to act with a confidence and enthusiasm probably never before permitted adolescent women in China.¹⁰⁷

These young women's activism was supported by official policy, especially two oft-cited statements by Mao: "Women hold up half the sky" and "Times have changed, and today men and women are equal. Whatever men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can too."

The concept of being youth--"qingnian" as opposed to "funu," or women—enabled young women to work and act without being defined and limited by their gender. According to an educated *qingnian* who left Shanghai to work on a state farm on Chongming Island:

Young women like me sensed few gender constraints in our devotion to the revolution. Numerous young female leaders emerged on this island with eight farms. This cohort never believed in female inferiority and was free from social expectations of the roles of wife and mother.... We never worried about being seen as unfeminine for surpassing men in our job performance. When young female and male leaders got together at meetings or training sessions, we talked about our work and discussed Marxist theories on equal terms.¹⁰⁸

As the Cultural Revolution spread to the working class in 1967, women workers in Shanghai, where they comprised one-third of the workforce, organized against oppressive policies in their factories and participated in power seizures from rightist managers and party officials. Thirty-two year old Wang Xiuzhen, a 32 year old

¹⁰⁵ In 1972, an influential article by Soong Ching Ling (Madam Sun Yat-sen) in *Peking Review*, titled "Women's Liberation in China," raised these issues. Part of this article is reprinted in Ruth Sidel, *Women and Child Care in China*, 1972, p. 184.

¹⁰⁶ Still, it is interesting to note that the "16 Point Decision," issued by the CCP Central Committee in 1966, did not mention fighting for the full equality of men and women as one of its points, and the call to criticize the "four olds"--feudal and bourgeois ideology, traditions, habits and customs—did not target patriarchy.

¹⁰⁷ Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s*, 1988, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Wang Zhen in *Some of Us*, p. 50.

technician in a textile mill, was the Vice-Chair of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee.

“Iron Girls Brigades,” teams of young women who took on the most demanding and difficult tasks, were formed in many enterprises. National publicity was given to these women as they broke into all-male jobs such as oil drilling, repairing high-voltage lines, and building bridges.¹⁰⁹ Increasing numbers of women worked in heavy industry, joined the militia and the PLA, and became technicians and assumed positions of leadership in the textile factories.¹¹⁰ Half of all doctors and “barefoot doctors” in the countryside were women.

Girls as well as boys in middle school received military training, and joined the People’s Militia in large numbers after they graduated. According to one observer, “These men and women were organized for [military] training, for brigade infrastructure projects, and for cultural and sports activities.... The training was practical and organizational, and cultivated a team spirit, a sense of purpose and discipline.”¹¹¹

New advances, particularly in the cities, were made in providing childcare. In some factories there were nursing rooms for infants, and 24 hour nurseries for children from two months to four years old. In one nursery, an American visitor was told that children learned to “care for each other, love and help each other” through stories, pictures and play.¹¹² Factories usually ran canteens and dining halls. It was understood that socializing childcare and other household tasks not only freed up women to work outside the home, but allowed them to develop as political activists and leaders.

A birth control campaign distributed free or low-cost contraceptive devices and advocated later marriages and smaller families—two children was the ideal. This was aimed not only at limiting the growth of China’s population, but freeing up women to participate in political life.

While some enterprises reached the official target of women making up 30% of the revolutionary committees,¹¹³ this was not achieved in most areas.¹¹⁴ In part this was due to resistance by men. Particularly in the rural areas, some male cadre claimed that it was not worthwhile to train and recruit women into the party because they would drop

¹⁰⁹ In the 1980s, in a manner familiar to women everywhere, Iron Girls were derided in the Chinese press as unwomanly, unmarriageable, unattractive “false boys.” Marilyn Young, “Chicken Little in China,” in *Promissory Notes: Women in the Transition to Socialism*, ed. Kruks, Rapp and Young, 1989, p. 241.

¹¹⁰ Phyllis Andors, *The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women: 1949-1980*, 1983, pp. 110, 135.

¹¹¹ Mobo Gao, *Gao Village*, p. 167.

¹¹² Sidel, pp. 92, 109-126. See also Goldwasser and Dowty, p. 163.

¹¹³ In one model commune, women were 35% of all party cadre and members of revolutionary committees. “Anhui County Women Criticize Lin-Confucius Slanders of Women,” New China News Agency, March 6, 1974. Visitors reported that there were more women on the revolutionary committees in the cities than in the rural areas.

¹¹⁴ Goldwasser and Dowty, p. 171. Their sample of factories (in which women made up from 12% to 67% of the workforce) found that women occupied from 4% to 18% of the positions on the plant revolutionary committees.

away after they married.¹¹⁵ A more common attitude, among both women and men cadre, was that leadership was to be judged on the basis of political consciousness and experience, not because a person was a man or woman—and that women were still catching up with men in these areas.¹¹⁶

At higher levels of leadership, women's representation was lower. At the Party Congresses held in 1956, 1969 and 1973, the women's membership of the CCP's Central Committee rose from 4% to 10% to 13%.¹¹⁷

Women in the Countryside

In the rural areas, the influence of patriarchal ideas and customs was much stronger than in the cities. This was in part due to the prevalence of traditional extended families headed by men. While many urban married couples were able to establish new households, when young rural women married, they generally left their villages and joined their husbands' families. Families still valued sons, since they would stay with and provide for the family. There was stronger male resistance to equality with women in the countryside, creating a suffocating political atmosphere in the home that undermined women's self-confidence and leadership abilities.¹¹⁸

In addition, a lower level of economic development obstructed rural women's progress. Less childcare was available and many children were cared for by their grandmothers. Fewer peasants than urban workers had pensions, building in a stronger preference for sons who would be able to take care of them in old age. In addition, household work was more onerous than in the cities.

The Cultural Revolution addressed this situation both materially and politically. New tractor, fertilizer and food processing plants served agriculture and provided more income for social services on the communes. Increased mechanization eliminated some of the heavy hand labor for which men earned more work points. As discussed in the section below on "barefoot doctors," health care services for women, men and children dramatically improved. Abortions were available on request, and were most common in families that already had the number of children they desired. Collective sewing groups with newly purchased sewing machines and the mechanization of grain grinding reduced the time women spent doing household work.

¹¹⁵ Andors, p. 131, and Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China*, 1983, p. 190.

¹¹⁶ Goldwasser and Dowty, p. 173.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹¹⁸ There are reports that some rural men were determined to overturn tradition. In one commune, "It was really the men who got the new ideas about women. They attended meetings where the Communist Party's policy was explained. When the activists came home from these meetings, they urged their wives to 'stand up.' ... First the women began to attend our own women's meetings to hear the revolutionary policy explained. Then soon we began attending the general meetings along with the men." Jack Ch'en, *A Year in Upper Felicity*, pp. 144-145.

In many communes, Iron Girls Brigades were organized, and women workers became more assertive in demanding equal pay for the same work done by men.¹¹⁹ All-women study groups and leadership training programs furthered this process. In some rural counties, there were three times as many women in leadership positions as there were before the Cultural Revolution.¹²⁰

Traditional ideas of a woman's place were challenged by the more than eight million young educated women who were sent to the countryside as part of the "xia-xiang" movement to work with and learn from the peasants. Without the burden of family responsibilities, they were able to take on jobs as teachers and medical workers as well as assume leadership positions in their production and village units.

These educated women also served as models for their sisters in the villages.¹²¹ In a visit to Liu Ling village in 1969, two Swedish journalists wrote about the transformation that a 39 year old woman experienced as a result of the Cultural Revolution. Now a member of the revolutionary committee, she explained why she had not previously been active in the brigade management board to which she belonged:

I was selfish. I had my household and my children to look after. I thought of my own private interests and was not an active member of the board.,,, But from studying Chairman Mao I realized what a mistake I'd been making, to sit silent at the meetings of the management board, thinking of my own household instead of the affairs of state. Before the Cultural Revolution women were too tied to their own homes. Now we read newspapers and discuss things. Formerly it was only the men who discussed things when resting from their work in the fields....

For the older of us, who never went to school, it's hard. The younger women study with us, though, and teach us from *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung*. The young women say we women must be capable of making up our minds and arriving at decisions.¹²²

As women emerged as political activists in the course of the Cultural Revolution, recruitment of women into the party and revolutionary committees, and into higher positions of leadership, was stepped up. In 1972 and early 1973, the Women's Federation was reestablished up to the provincial level in most of the country.¹²³ This helped create a political base for further transformations.

¹¹⁹ Andors, p. 143. Joan Hinton, "Politics and Marriage," *New China*, June 1976.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹²¹ Andors, pp. 147-48. Andors relates that young women who married local commune members were praised for defying the traditional prohibition against marrying "lower" than one's class, and for insisting on freedom of choice in marriage.

¹²² Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle, *China: The Revolution Continued, The Cultural Revolution at the Village Level*, 1970, p. 137.

¹²³ Johnson, p. 195. The Women's Federation was disbanded in 1967 due to its narrow focus on family and welfare issues and downplaying the role of women in political struggle Andors, p. 103; Young, *Women in China*, pp. 170-171.

In 1974, a more frontal attack on the patriarchal oppression of women took place in the course of the “Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius” campaign.¹²⁴ The national media highlighted the links between Confucian ideas of male supremacy and the patriarchal ideas and customs still prevalent in Chinese society. An essential part of this campaign was the women’s associations at the local level where women were able to speak more freely about the discrimination and extra burdens they faced. Many county-level party committees established “women’s work offices” whose tasks focused on holding political study classes for women. In one Beijing neighborhood, it was reported that over 60,000 women were engaged in the study of Marxist theory.¹²⁵

The understanding that women gained through their study of Confucianism was used to attack gender-based inequalities in public and family life. The household roles of women were questioned, leading to the widespread promotion as role models of men who cared for children and did housework while their wives studied or attended political meetings.¹²⁶

The institution of marriage and the concept of equal pay for equal work were subjected to new scrutiny. In Hopeh a province-wide campaign was launched by the Women’s Federation to carry out work in three areas:

(1) the promotion of free-choice marriage, late marriage, the abolition of bride prices and traditional marriage rituals symbolizing the “sale” of women; (2) the promotion of equal pay for equal work for women, include a major effort to redefine “equal work” as “work of comparable value” rather than the “same work,” since much work in rural China is sex-typed; and (3) the establishment of year-round nurseries and kindergartens, along with agitation for the idea the men should share in household chores.¹²⁷

A closely related issue raised during the anti-Confucius campaign was the promotion of intra-village marriages, which challenged the feudal tradition that women had to “marry away” in another village. This allowed young women to choose their own marriage partners from school, work, the militia and youth groups in the village. It also allowed them to stay, and develop as leaders, in their native villages.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ This campaign drew links between Lin’s political outlook and that of Confucius, who had fought to defend the institutions of slave society 2500 years ago. Confucian ideology, with its rigid social distinctions and insistence that scholars should rule, was an important target of the Cultural Revolution. One of Confucius’s sayings was to “call to office those who have retired to obscurity.” Thus, criticizing Confucius was an allegorical way of criticizing newly rehabilitated capitalist roaders such as Deng Xiaoping.

¹²⁵ Andors, pp. 132, 133.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 128-129.

¹²⁷ Johnson, p. 201-202. See also the account by Joan Hinton of the anti-Confucius campaign in a village near Beijing in “Politics and Marriage,” *New China*, June 1976.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 202-203. There were also concerted efforts to encourage matrilocal marriages, whereby men would join their wives’ families. Much of the impetus for this came from the population control campaign, which sought to lessen women’s fears that they would not be taken care of in old age if they did not have sons. Ibid., pp. 199-200.

As was true of all the “socialist new things” that emerged in the course of the Cultural Revolution, these attempts to uproot traditional male chauvinist attitudes and practices in family and public life made more headway in some areas than others. According to an American social worker who talked to women in childcare centers and factories in urban areas, divorce was freely available. On the other hand, an American scholar whose fieldwork was in the countryside reports that contested divorces, usually initiated by women, were granted only after a long process of informal and formal mediation aimed at reconciling the parties.¹²⁹

The issue of Chinese women and sexuality often comes up during discussions of the Cultural Revolution. On the one hand, there was no commodification of women as there is in capitalist society. There were no women selling goods on billboards or their bodies on the streets. Women’s clothing was functional, not designed to differentiate or attract. The urban women that an American visitor met in 1971 wore dark pants, a white blouse and a simple button-up-the-front jacket—all loose fitting.¹³⁰ An American newspaper editor who visited China in 1972 made a revealing comment: “In twenty three days in China, I didn’t see a single grown woman in a skirt. And a bosom line is almost as hard to find.”¹³¹

For women in socialist China, freedom was thought to mean freedom to work outside the home, freedom to engage in political life and struggle, freedom to build a socialist society, and freedom from being treated as sex objects, but not sexual freedom. Other than in the course of birth control campaigns, there was almost no public discussion of issues of sexuality. Sex before marriage was off limits; young women who violated the requirement of chastity were severely ostracized. Traditional ideas about “proper behavior” tended to restrict social interactions between youth, including public displays of affection.¹³² However, these restrictions may have been more pronounced in the urban areas. According to Mobo Gao:

It is true that even in traditional China the rural poor of both sexes were never as sexually restrained as the educated elite. But the participation in political life by women and their liberation in terms of self-expression and self-fulfillment were never as extensive and obvious as in the period of the Cultural Revolution in Qinglin, and Gao Village. For example, it was through local militia training sessions that Gao Chaoxin and Jiang Tonger fell in love with each other and got married.¹³³

¹²⁹ Sidel, p. 49; Johnson, pp. 213-214.

¹³⁰ Sidel, p. 39. In 1989, a young Chinese woman in Beijing told an American visitor that she had to wear high heels and be one of the “pretty girls” to get an office job. Her grandmother commented that her high heels were just a new form of foot-binding.

¹³¹ Goldwasser and Dowty, p. 159.

¹³² According to one account, several boys and girls in the countryside were arrested for talking with each other in the same room late at night. Johnson, p. 183.

¹³³ *Gao Village*, p. 166.

To the extent that tight social restrictions for youth still existed, they undermined the idea of a free choice of partners for marriage, and denied young women and men the power to control their own sexuality. Another example of this narrow view of “socialist morality” was that public discussion about homosexuality, even the existence of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people in Chinese society, was unheard of.

In sum, in one generation, the material conditions and quality of women’s lives in China had taken a great leap ahead. It was understood during the Cultural Revolution that this was the result of the sweat and struggle of men and women alike to build socialism, and that full equality for women could only be achieved through the development of collective socialist institutions.

At the same time, there was an underestimation of the need for extensive, ongoing political mobilizations and campaigns to root out male supremacist ideas, overcome social inequalities between men and women, and develop powerful women’s leadership in all areas of society. An important part of this is understanding the critical importance of women’s organizations in bringing these issues to the fore within the revolutionary movement, in socialist as well as capitalist society.

As we make these critical observations, they must be placed in historical perspective. Revolutionary women in China during the 1960s and 70s were trying to find the way forward to the full liberation of women in a socialist society that had just emerged from feudalism, permeated with a thousands year old system of ideas and customs that subjugated women in all ways.

During the same years, bourgeois and revolutionary women in the U.S. were contending over the road to, and the nature of, liberation in an imperialist society with a much higher level of economic development, a different culture, and a different mix of mechanisms for perpetuating women’s inequality. Thus, the struggle of Chinese women during the Cultural Revolution cannot be viewed through a U.S. or European lens. The areas of great progress, and slow progress, of Chinese women during the Cultural Revolution must be evaluated on the basis of the actual challenges they faced at that time.

Since the Cultural Revolution, revolutionaries worldwide have gained new insights into the operation of patriarchy. Important advances have been made in mobilizing women in struggle against all of the forms of oppression they face, and in assuming positions as leading political activists and leaders of revolutionary organizations. These advances in theory and practice will help chart the way forward for future socialist societies to break all the chains of women’s oppression.

(3) Narrowing and Overcoming Class Differences and Inequalities in Socialist Society

Under socialism, production is planned to meet the needs of society rather than

maximize profit. However, as noted earlier, many inequalities continue to exist in socialist society. These include significant differences in education, cultural level and technical expertise, wage inequalities, differences between the rural areas and the more advanced cities, and in access to decision making power. These social relations and class differences must be transformed step by step through mass initiatives and campaigns in order to advance along the socialist road. Below we look at the radical transformations of the Cultural Revolution in industry and agriculture.¹³⁴

Workers Transform Their Factories

After the Cultural Revolution was launched in the spring of 1966, politically conscious workers in China's industrial centers watched events closely. Some made contact with local Red Guard groups and began to discuss their grievances with the top-down system of management that had been widely imposed in the early 1960s. One of the first groups to organize themselves in the factories was the "revolutionary technicians," many of who were former workers. They began to criticize the formally educated "technical authorities" in their plants who relied on Western or Soviet technical methods and refused to experiment or listen to workers' suggestions for innovations.¹³⁵

The mass uprising of hundreds of thousands of workers in Shanghai in January 1967 was a signal to workers elsewhere, particularly workers in large state-owned enterprises who had participated in the Great Leap Forward, to organize and seize power from managers and party cadre who were running their factories like capitalist enterprises. These power seizures were led by varying combinations of rank and file workers, work group leaders, technicians, middle-level managers, and revolutionary cadre at various levels.¹³⁶ Where these in-plant uprisings took place, elected revolutionary committees--composed of workers, technicians and party cadre--took over directing the daily activities of the factories. This new form of factory management was promoted as a model and spread nationwide during 1967 and early 1968.

This political mobilization and surge of China's industrial workers enabled them to make many of the transformations within the factories that had first been attempted with varying degrees of success during the Great Leap Forward. Piece wage systems were abolished; by 1971, individual and group bonuses had been eliminated in most plants.¹³⁷ Production teams took over managerial responsibilities for their units. They took attendance, planned daily tasks, recorded use of materials, scheduled maintenance, performed quality control and coordinated production with other units. In some factories, yearly production quotas were determined after a lengthy process of consultation with all

¹³⁴ This is an important part of "transforming the relations of production." See page 76 for an explanation of this concept.

¹³⁵ Andors, p. 163,

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 165-172.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 218. These decisions were made at the factory level.

units in the plant, and production teams determined their own pay within the basic wage scale, based on length of experience, level of skill, and their attitude towards work and fellow workers.¹³⁸

At the same time, the 8 grade wage system—in which the differential between the highest paid skilled workers and the lowest paid unskilled workers averaged three to one—was not a subject of struggle. One reason for this was that seniority allowed workers' wages to increase over the years; in some cases, senior skilled workers made more than managers.¹³⁹

As the Cultural Revolution progressed, managers and full-time cadre in all industrial enterprises were required to work on the shop floors on a regular or rotating basis. Those with intellectual backgrounds were given training in a particular skill. Members of in-plant revolutionary committees, as well as their administrative staff, participated in labor and made regular visits to the shop floor to assess conditions and make decisions. "Triple combinations" of workers, technicians and administrators were organized to solve technical problems and make innovations at the point of production.

Though it undoubtedly varied greatly from plant to plant, political study was a part of the daily work routine. Mao's works were not studied as abstract theory, but as a method of investigating and solving production problems and political issues in the factories. In late 1967, a campaign in the factories was launched to criticize Liu Shaoqi's "70 Articles" from the early 1960s in order to clarify the differences between socialist and capitalist mechanisms of production both within the factories and in the system of nationwide economic planning and organization.¹⁴⁰

Particularly in the large state-owned enterprises, dependence on advanced foreign technology, Soviet or Western, was criticized. The large oilfields at Daqing in northeast China, which had been opened and operated with Chinese equipment and engineering, were held up a national model for self-reliant effort which created new production methods and products suited to Chinese conditions. This policy helped protect China's political independence as well.

In addition, news of the progress of the Cultural Revolution and revolutionary struggles around the world was widely available in the plants. Individual workers could make their views known on any subject within or outside the plant by pasting dazibaos on the walls or by speaking out at "mass airings" in front of the entire factory staff. This system promoted a constant give-and-take between the workers and the factory's revolutionary committee.

In order to raise the technical and educational level of greater numbers of workers at all skill levels, a variety of schools and training institutes were set up inside the factories. In one large Shanghai machine tools plant, a "July 21 university" enrolled its first class of fifty two workers in 1968, with an average age of 29. A two and a half year course prepared to them to become technicians in the factory with a high level of political

¹³⁸ Gamberg, p. 190.

¹³⁹ Andors, p. 221.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 187.

consciousness. By 1974, there were 34 factory-run full-time workers' universities in Shanghai.¹⁴¹

In many factories, "spare time schools" were set up, where hundreds of workers studied technology, politics and culture. Since women were more recent arrivals to many factories, these in-plant training courses created increased opportunities for them to move into higher skilled jobs. A factory worker in Beijing described the classes she had attended that were given by veteran skilled workers:

They taught us about electricity, how to read blueprints, geometry, chemistry, all kinds of things that we needed to know to do our job well. I think that by having the actual experience of working in the factory combined with theory in the classes, we learned much quicker, and we did not slow down production.¹⁴²

The new system of factory management was put to use in solving a thorny production problem at the Anshan Iron and Steel Works, the largest, but also one of the oldest industrial complexes in China. In the 1960s, the plant's production of rolled steel was beginning to fall. In 1971, leading cadre at one of Anshan's old smelting mills claimed that its output could only be raised through an infusion of state funds, causing their renovation plan to remain on paper for years.

After these leaders were criticized for not relying on the workers in the mills, the responsible revolutionary committee organized a dozen "three-in-one" teams who worked closely with shop floor workers to solve the difficult technological problems of modernizing the mill. Using only internal funds, the workers rebuilt the old mill and were able to double its output.¹⁴³

The mass campaign at Anshan rooted out conservative views on how to increase production and state funds by relying on the workers' political consciousness and their hands-on understanding of production. During the Cultural Revolution this orientation was capsulized in the phrase "grasp revolution, promote production." Despite some disruptions during the Cultural Revolution, industrial production in China grew by more than 10% yearly from 1966 to 1976.¹⁴⁴

These revolutionary innovations in industry were not uniform. In more than a few factories, workers faced strong resistance from party cadre, managers and technicians to the new system of factory administration. However, it was deeply rooted in some areas. In December 1976, even after the military coup that brought an end to the Maoist era, an Italian teacher visited a power station in Shanghai where the workers still shared in management at all levels, and young workers were sent to universities to return to the

¹⁴¹ CCAS, p. 178; Andors, p. 237.

¹⁴² Gamberg, p. 284.

¹⁴³ *New China's First Quarter-Century*, pp. 79-82.

www.etext.org/Politics/MIM/classics/lifeundermao/newchina1975.html

¹⁴⁴ Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: 1978-1994*, 1996, p. 189; Mobo Gao, "Debating the Cultural Revolution," pp. 424-25.

plant as technicians.¹⁴⁵

As the Deng Xiaoping regime consolidated power in the late 1970s, these transformations were wiped out. Under the new “manager responsibility” system, all authority was placed in the hands of factory managers. They decided how production was organized, whether to hire or fire employees, how much to pay workers, and how much they, the new bosses, would get paid.

Peasant Empowerment and Learning from Dazhai

While the mass upsurges of the Cultural Revolution were concentrated in the cities, major social transformations took place in the rural areas, where 80% of the people still lived. With encouragement from Red Guard groups in village middle schools, peasants in many areas formed independent mass associations. This movement launched a frontal challenge to the traditional political culture of submission to authority in the countryside.

These organizations of newly empowered peasants brought the political attitudes and work habits of party cadre and leadership at all levels—the commune, production brigade and production team¹⁴⁶—under intense scrutiny. Mao’s works became a weapon, a de facto constitution, for peasants in their debates with abusive and bureaucratic village leaders. According to a number of peasants interviewed in the 1990s, the term “newly arisen bourgeoisie” referred to party leaders who did not work but bossed people around like the old landlords and capitalists.¹⁴⁷

Commune leaders no longer appointed production team leaders; they were elected by the team members. If the leaders did not do a good job, they would lose their positions at the end of the year. In one county in Shandong, the production team leaders had to be replaced every year.¹⁴⁸ An important part of the evaluation of local party cadre was how much time they spent working alongside ordinary farmers in the fields.

Beginning in late 1967, a new power structure began to replace the old party apparatus in many areas. Mass associations, composed mainly of poor and lower middle peasants, chose people to sit on newly organized village revolutionary committees. These committees exercised day to day leadership in the villages and on the communes.¹⁴⁹

With the encouragement of cultural workers from the cities, peasants developed as

¹⁴⁵ Masi, pp. 219-20.

¹⁴⁶ The team, consisting of 20-30 families, was the basic unit of production. The team leadership was responsible for the day-to-day planning of farming, calculation of work-points, and the distribution of income. The production brigade was composed of several teams. Ten to thirty production brigades made up a commune, which was mainly concerned with overall planning, building new factories and infrastructural projects, and with education and health services.

¹⁴⁷ Dongping Han, p. 65.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 67-68. For a study of similar transformations in Sichuan Province, see Stephen Endicott, *Red Earth; Revolution in a Sichuan Village*, 1989.

painters, writers and performers. A vast expansion of education and health services brought immediate benefits to the lives of people in the rural areas.

The expansion of private plots and free markets in the early 1960s was reversed, with a renewed emphasis on political consciousness and collective effort. Dazhai, one brigade of a commune in a rocky and eroded part of Shanxi Province, was promoted as a model for agriculture during the Cultural Revolution. According to William Hinton, who spent decades working in the Chinese countryside:

With a spirit of self-reliance, and without aid from the state, Dazhai transformed its hills and gullies into fertile fields by cutting stone, laying up walls, and carrying in earth. This transformation was carried out through collective effort after protracted political education and in the course of constant struggle against individualism and private-profit mentality. The result was a gradually rising standard of living for all members of the brigade, expanding sales of surplus grain to the state instead of demands for relief, the accumulation of reserves against bad years, the reconstruction of most of the housing in the village, and the establishment of many community projects to serve the people and community industries to supplement agricultural income.¹⁵⁰

In 1971, the Dazhai brigade was linking together hillside terraces and low-lying plots to be able to utilize farm machinery. In the preceding years, the county in which Dazhai was located had built its own garden tractors, electrical generators, a chemical fertilizer plant, a small iron blast furnace, and became self-sufficient in cement.¹⁵¹

During the Cultural Revolution, there was a big push to mechanize agriculture. In the farming area around Shanghai, the amount of land that was machine-tilled grew from 17% in 1965 to 76% in 1972. The rural industrialization program begun during the Great Leap Forward was accelerated. By the end of the Cultural Revolution, there were nearly 800,000 rural industrial enterprises, plus 90,000 small hydroelectric stations, producing 15% of China's industrial output.¹⁵² These advances could not have been achieved without the rapid expansion of the rural educational system during the Cultural Revolution, which produced agricultural experts, and technicians and skilled workers for commune factories and workshops.

In areas of the countryside where there was strong leadership, there were impressive gains in production, but in other areas production stagnated.¹⁵³ Many large-

¹⁵⁰ Hinton, *Turning Point in China*, p. 42. Due to Dazhai's abolishment of private plots and emphasis on political education, conservative party officials and military commanders in some areas opposed implementing the "Learn from Dazhai" campaign.

¹⁵¹ CCAS, pp. 171-173.

¹⁵² Feigon, pp. 168,169.

¹⁵³ According to Hinton, "In the countryside, for every village that prospered, another village stagnated, while still a third made indifferent progress. Many factors contributed to this mixed record, but the most important was inadequate leadership. Where a village had a capable, honest and committed party secretary, and best of all a party branch to match, it tended to forge ahead." Even though many well-run communes doubled or tripled their output, China's grain production during the Maoist era was only slightly ahead of population growth. "The Chinese Revolution," *Monthly Review*, November 1991, p. 9. Jimo Country in Shandong, in which per capita income

scale infrastructural projects that were aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and the peasants' standard of living were undertaken during the Cultural Revolution involving tens of thousands of workers. In one part of Guangdong Province that the CCAS delegation visited in 1971, three communes had joined together to build a huge network of irrigation and flood control projects, including three large dams. Each dam had its own small hydroelectric station.

In one county in Shandong Province, large-scale infrastructural projects were often popular initiatives, an important change from the Great Leap Forward, when peasants were sent out to work by commune and village leaders with no input on their part. On some projects, schoolteachers, students and local government employees joined the construction crews after they got off work.¹⁵⁴

These social and economic transformations in the Chinese countryside were thrown sharply into reverse after 1976. The achievements of the Dazhai brigade were denounced as a fraud. The communes and collectives were broken up, and land was distributed to peasant households in what became known as the "family responsibility system." Cadres, relatives, friends and cronies were able to buy at massive discounts the tractors, trucks, wells, pumps, processing equipment and other property that the collectives had accumulated over decades through the hard labor of all members.¹⁵⁵ Privatization also spelled the end of the collective health care system in the countryside.

Health Care and "Barefoot Doctors"

Prior to the Cultural Revolution, health care resources—doctors, hospital facilities and money—were concentrated in the cities. This system left hundreds of millions of peasants with rudimentary medical care, and it impeded the flow of advanced medical knowledge back to the villages.

One of the most dynamic innovations of the Cultural Revolution was the system of "barefoot doctors" that helped narrow the gap in health services between rural and urban areas. By the mid-1970s, more than a million of these paramedics, four times as many as in 1965, were working in the countryside. Many of them were educated urban youth who were part of the movement "down to the villages."

The first group of 28 barefoot doctors, trained by Shanghai doctors in 1968 at Chiangchen People's Commune, set a pioneering example for the country. Their guidelines were to serve the countryside, to place prevention of diseases first, and to combine mental and manual labor—"calluses on hands, mud on feet, medicine kit on shoulder, poor and lower-middle peasants in mind."

more than doubled between 1966 and 1976, was an example of the first category. Dongping Han, p. 147.

¹⁵⁴ Dongping Han, pp. 128-130.

¹⁵⁵ For a detailed analysis of the post-Cultural Revolution "reforms" in agriculture, see William Hinton, *The Great Reversal: The Privatization of China, 1978-1989*, 1990.

One of the first steps taken by these new medical workers was to train disease-prevention health workers from the peasants, enabling each production brigade to have its own health center. In one brigade, the barefoot doctors devoted a third to a half of their time to farm work. This not only created a medical corps with strong ties to the peasants, it enabled brigade doctors to help develop a rice strain that had high yields and eliminated disease-bearing mosquitoes. Finally, upon the recommendations of the peasants they worked with, the commune sent five barefoot doctors to medical school to pursue more advanced studies.¹⁵⁶

Urban hospitals and medical schools turned their attention to the countryside, establishing medical centers on communes and providing doctors to staff them. A commune hospital or clinic served two purposes: as a treatment center for seriously ill patients, and as a training center for barefoot doctors and midwives. After an initial training course of six months to a year, they would return for follow-up courses during the slack season. They continued to work in the fields and were paid by their communes.

The tasks of these new doctors went far beyond the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses. They administered vaccinations, demonstrated the correct use of pesticides, introduced new sanitation methods, and taught mothers about nutrition and child care. In addition to helping rural women to give birth at home, midwives were trained to diagnose a difficult birth early enough to bring the mother to a commune hospital. At the rural hospitals and clinics visited by the CCAS delegation, medicine was free.¹⁵⁷

During the same years, Red Medical Teams, an urban and industrial version of the barefoot doctors, were established. After a basic course and recurrent follow-up sessions, they staffed factory clinics and cared for the health of their fellow workers.

The training of doctors and medical staff at urban hospitals also went through major changes during the Cultural Revolution. In medical schools, the program of study was shortened from six years to three years, followed by an internship of one and a half years. The curriculum was revised to place more emphasis on preventative medicine. Most graduates were generalists, not specialists. They would spend a good part of their lives in the countryside as part of mobile teams, or they resettled there.¹⁵⁸

In addition, many traditional forms of medicine, such as herbal remedies and acupuncture anesthesia, were widely used during the Cultural Revolution. Research institutes studied Chinese medicine to put it on a scientific and standardized basis, while many hospitals began to combine Chinese and Western medicine into an integrated system for the treatment of illness.

The end of the Cultural Revolution led to a rapid and drastic decline in the health care system in the countryside. The barefoot doctor system was abandoned by Deng's regime in 1981. Doctors set up their own private practices, making medical treatment

¹⁵⁶ *New China's First-Quarter Century*, pp. 199-209. See also the description in Meisner, p. 360.

¹⁵⁷ CCAS, pp. 239-240.

well beyond the means of most villagers. After the collectives were dissolved in 1983, health care insurance disappeared in the countryside.¹⁵⁹

Radical social transformations in education, health care, culture, industry, agriculture, the position of women, and collective, internationalist values were essential to achieving the aims of the Cultural Revolution. Still, the course that the Cultural Revolution took varied tremendously across China's huge territory. The revolutionary transformations described above were uneven, and were not implemented over a long enough period to take firm root. Particularly as they came under attack by rightist forces, the "socialist new things" did not always survive, even prior to the revisionist coup in 1976 that brought the Cultural Revolution to an end.

G. The Obstacles that the Cultural Revolution Faced, and its Shortcomings

After the passage of 40 years, it is important to avoid an idealized picture of the Cultural Revolution. Such a view does not come to grips with the immense difficulties the Cultural Revolution had to overcome, and it does not lead to a deeper understanding of the factors that led to its eventual defeat. In addition, such a view cannot pass on important lessons that will help future socialist societies deal with new and complex conditions.

In order to understand the inability of the Cultural Revolution to consolidate its achievements, two kinds of questions must be addressed. The first concern the objective factors, internal and external to China, that existed in the 1960s and 1970s. The second set of questions concern shortcomings in how it was conducted and unintended but still negative consequences.

To begin with, the Cultural Revolution was an uphill battle. The Chinese revolution had gone through an extended period of new democratic revolution beginning in the 1920s. Even taking into consideration the social transformations in the liberated areas and after nationwide victory in 1949, it was not possible to completely eradicate feudal and bourgeois ideology in a few years, or even in one or two generations. The deep roots of Confucianism, especially its reverence for established authority, was a major target of the revolutionary forces in both the opening and later stages of the Cultural Revolution. "It is right to rebel against reactionaries!" was not a semi-anarchist slogan but a call to break the stranglehold of thousands of years of ideological indoctrination and to prevent a new class of Confucian sages—dressed up as Marxist-Leninists—from usurping power.

¹⁵⁹ Mobo Gao, p. 88.

In addition, there was a relatively short period of socialist construction before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Much of that was conducted on the basis of the experience of building socialism in the Soviet Union, which had many weaknesses even prior to the rise of Khrushchev and state capitalism in the mid-50s.¹⁶⁰ As noted earlier, by the early 1960s, much of the top CCP leadership was implementing a pro-Soviet revisionist line with Chinese characteristics, and their network of party and government officials was firmly entrenched at all levels. On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, this was the situation faced by Mao and other revolutionary party leaders--as well as tens of millions of workers and peasants who had been told that their party would always stay red.

International conditions were an important part of the objective situation for the Cultural Revolution. In 1966, the situation in the world was favorable for such an unprecedented revolution within a socialist society. It was no exaggeration to say that revolution was the main trend in the world and imperialism was on the defensive. U.S. imperialism—the chief enemy of the proletariat and oppressed peoples of the world—was bogged down in South Vietnam due to the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people, and national liberation struggles were on the rise in Asia, Africa, Latin America and within the imperialist countries. The Chinese Communist Party had launched a bold challenge to the revisionist Communist Party of the Soviet Union and to its undisputed leadership over the international communist movement.

However, just three years into the Cultural Revolution, the military intervention of the Soviet imperialists in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the threat of a Soviet nuclear attack on China in 1969 produced a radically different international playing field for the People's Republic. As described in more detail in our paper on Chinese foreign policy during the Maoist era,¹⁶¹ this forced Mao and the party leadership to make an opening to the West in order to avoid fighting on two fronts. This shift also provided a political opening to and strengthened the position of pro-Western sections of the leadership.

When combined with the political defection of Lin Biao and other leaders of the Cultural Revolution such as Chen Boda, these events led to a shift to the right on the part of a large number of party and government officials grouped around Premier Zhou Enlai. With Zhou's backing, many revisionist leaders who had been knocked down in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution were rehabilitated after making perfunctory "self-criticisms," including Deng Xiaoping. This set the stage for a full-scale counter-attack on the Cultural Revolution.

Perhaps most importantly, the Cultural Revolution was an uphill battle because of a lack of historical experience. Just as Lenin, Stalin and the Soviet Union had no prior experience to draw on in building a socialist society in the 1920s and 30s, Mao had to develop a new understanding of the persistence of class struggle in socialist society, how capitalism can be restored, and a political line and mechanisms for keeping China on the

¹⁶⁰ See three essays written by Mao between 1958-1962, reprinted in *A Critique of Soviet Economics*, 1977.

¹⁶¹ See pp. 26-27.

socialist road. In launching the Cultural Revolution, Mao and the other revolutionaries in the CCP were moving into uncharted political territory.

Below are a number of specific problems faced by the Cultural Revolution, and shortcomings in how it was carried out.¹⁶²

(1) At times, factionalism—in the sense of groups placing their own narrow interests above political principle-- was a difficult problem to resolve. First, it must be said that what may have appeared to be factional power grabs were often examples of acute class struggle between revisionist party officials who formed conservative factions among the masses to defend their privileged positions on the one hand, and mass organizations of revolutionary workers, peasants and youth on the other.

In the course of the Cultural Revolution, rightist and leftist groupings all claimed to be following “Chairman Mao’s revolutionary line.” In this complex and often confusing situation, party members and the masses of people could only distinguish between correct and incorrect lines—between the socialist road and the road back to capitalism—by engaging in political and ideological study, discussion and struggle. In many cases, disputes between leftist groupings had to be resolved by the intervention of the People’s Liberation Army, which brought new problems. Further advances in the Cultural Revolution and consolidation of its achievements would have required a higher level of political consciousness and willingness to put collective interests first in order to reduce the level of unprincipled factional struggle.

Based on their own experience, many readers of this paper know how hard it can be to figure out how best to struggle for revolution in situations where there isn’t much in the way of historical experience. During the course of the Cultural Revolution, it is understandable that there would be great tumult and uncertainty, and even dedicated revolutionary activists inevitably made mistakes.

(2) The unleashing of millions of Red Guards in the spring of 1966 to criticize the Four Olds and revisionist party officials brought with it a set of unanticipated problems. Many Red Guard organizations ignored the policy of using reason, not force, in conducting political struggle. Mao rejected the slogan adopted by some of the Red Guard groups, “doubt everything and overthrow everything.”¹⁶³ He repeatedly stated that 95% of the people could be united in the course of the Cultural Revolution, and that the method of political education, of “curing the disease to save the patient,” should be applied with people who had made mistakes.

Behind some of these ultra-leftist Red Guard groups were several members of the CCRG led by Wang Li who were calling for the overthrow of the majority of top state personnel. In 1967, the Minister of Coal suffered a fatal heart attack at the hands of these

¹⁶² The advances and shortcomings in the struggle for the liberation of women during the Maoist era are discussed on pp. 35-44.

¹⁶³ See van Ginneken, pp. 111-149 for a description of this ultra-leftist tendency during 1967’s mass upsurge.

“rebels” and the Minister of Railways disappeared altogether. Their ultimate target was Premier Zhou Enlai, who was playing an important role in support of the Cultural Revolution at that time. Wang Li and his allies were also behind the burning of the British embassy in Beijing in 1967. It turned out that their ultra-leftist activities were being coordinated by the secret “May 16th Group,” which was dissolved, and its leaders were expelled from the party.¹⁶⁴

In addition there were cases when different Red Guard groups were consumed with fighting each other. One famous example of student factionalism and its successful resolution concerns Tsinghua University, China's preeminent school of science and engineering. Two factions of Tsinghua students, each claiming to uphold Mao Zedong Thought, had armed themselves and clashed for months, paralyzing the campus. In July 1968, Mao, the CCRG and the Beijing Municipal Revolutionary Committee decided that the situation had gone too far. They contacted a group of revolutionary workers at the Hsinhua Printing Plant to put out a call for the formation of Workers Propaganda Teams to go to Tsinghua, armed only with Red Books and the slogan, "Use Reason, not Violence."

On July 27, over 30,000 unarmed workers entered the campus, with columns assigned to surround buildings occupied by the armed student factions. As the workers successfully persuaded some students to lay down their arms, the largest armed faction launched an attack on the workers with spears, rifles and grenades. By the following morning, five workers lay dead and more than 700 had serious wounds. Nevertheless, the workers did not retaliate against the students, and in less than 24 hours most of the students surrendered, while a few die-hards fled the campus.¹⁶⁵

Due to the political weaknesses of many Red Guard organizations, Mao and the Central Cultural Revolution Group began to rein them in during late 1966. Over the next few years, 17 million educated youth, including many Red Guards, were sent to the countryside to work alongside, learn from and use their skills to serve the peasants. Many had a hard time adjusting to rural life, but significant numbers of urban youth decided to settle down, started families and contributed their skills and education to the socialist development of the countryside.

(3) In spite of the August 1966 directive that the principal target of the Cultural

¹⁶⁴ In his “Letter to the Red Guards of Tsinghua University Middle School,” Mao wrote, “While supporting you, at the same time we ask you to pay attention to uniting with all who can be united with. As for those who have committed serious mistakes, after their mistakes have been pointed out, you should offer them a way out of their difficulties by giving them work to do, and enabling them to correct their mistakes and become new men.” Schram, pp. 260-61.

In February 1967, Mao remarked, “Our method of struggle should now be on a higher level. We shouldn’t keep on saying, ‘Smash their dogs’ heads, down with XXX.’ I think that university students should make a deeper study of things and choose a few passages to write some critical articles about.” “Talks at Three Meetings with Comrades Chang Chun-chiao and Yao Wen-yuan,” Schram, p. 279.

¹⁶⁵ William Hinton, *Hundred Day War: The Cultural Revolution at Tsinghua University*, 1972, p. 187.

Revolution was high-ranking party officials taking the capitalist road, intellectuals, especially those trained in the pre-Liberation era, were repeated, high-profile targets. At some points, nearly all teachers, writers and other intellectuals came under fire from Red Guard groups.¹⁶⁶

When the policy on intellectuals was applied in a more focused way, rightist intellectuals were challenged and criticized in public. Some were sent to work in the countryside, where they did manual work and lived with peasants for the first time in their lives. In the course of political discussion and struggle, many intellectuals were won over to the goals of the Cultural Revolution and returned to their positions with a new outlook.

In addition to remolding and winning over as many of the intellectuals as possible, one of the goals of the Cultural Revolution was to develop working class intellectuals from the workers, peasants and soldiers. The first contingent of 200, 000 proletarian intellectuals were graduated in 1974.¹⁶⁷ However, this success story was halted by the defeat of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. One year later, nationwide admission examinations were reinstated, with a predictable impact on the numbers of workers and peasants attending universities.

Of course, there is some truth in the dozens of books written by intellectuals and other relatively privileged groups who suffered during the Cultural Revolution—though it is questionable whether being deprived of their normal life style or leaving a comfortable city job to work on a commune qualifies as "suffering." But in evaluating these accounts, it is worth remembering that history gets written by the victors. Many of the accounts of persecution and torture of intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution are as useful and reliable as seeing the pro-slavery movie, "Birth of a Nation," as a guide to the history of the Civil War and Black Reconstruction in the U.S.

Entirely missing from this one-sided view of the Cultural Revolution are the accounts of barefoot doctors who brought health care to millions in the vast Chinese countryside for the first time, of workers who devised new techniques for raising

¹⁶⁶ A little known fact concerning the attacks on intellectuals is that many of these attacks were initiated by party officials and other forces intent on preserving their privilege. According to Maurice Meisner: "Contrary to the current version of events, the terrible persecution of intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution was begun not by Maoist radicals but rather by Party-organized "rebels" intent on protecting Party bureaucrats from Maoist assaults. . . Intellectuals, the most vulnerable group in Chinese society and the most conveniently identifiable as "bourgeois" would be indiscriminately attacked from virtually all political quarters over the course of the Cultural Revolution, but at the outset the principal culprits in this unsavory business were groups operating under the sponsorship of the established Party apparatus which was itself under Maoist attack. . . . The political intentions behind the attack on intellectuals in general were the same: to protect the existing Party machine. pp. 316-317. See also Mobo Gao, "Debating the Cultural Revolution," p. 424.

¹⁶⁷ Han Suyin, *Wind in the Tower: Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Revolution, 1949-1975*, p. 332. Han Suyin was a liberal friend of the Chinese revolution but became an apologist for Deng's regime after Mao's death.

production on a basis of self-reliance, and of educated youth whose lives were enriched by the years they spent in the countryside.

Some of the rare examples of such counter-narratives about the Cultural Revolution published in the West in recent years include Mobo Gao's *Gao Village*, Dongping Han's *The Unknown Cultural Revolution*, and *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era*. In one account from the latter book, a young woman from Beijing describes the eight years she spent in a remote village in northeastern China:

I learned to do all kinds of farm work and considered myself a good farmer. I planned and arranged farm activities year round (of course, with help from my peasant partner) and took the lead in doing them. I adopted the local dialect and the peasants' ways of living and chatting to the point that I could pass as a northeasterner.... Yes, I had changed. I discarded the vanity and sense of superiority typical of city folks and became more down to earth. My life in the countryside changed my way of looking at the world and at life.¹⁶⁸

(4) Red Guard groups and workers and peasants organizations, each claiming to be flying the "red flag," at times resorted to force during political struggle. This violated the explicit instructions of the "16 Point Decision," one of which was that:

The method to be used in debates is to present the facts, reason things out, and persuade through reasoning. Any method of forcing a minority holding different views to submit is impermissible. The minority should be protected, because sometimes the truth is with the minority. Even if the minority is wrong, they should still be allowed to argue their case and reserve their views.

However, these instructions were simply ignored and openly violated by some of the forces that joined in the at times chaotic mass upsurges of the Cultural Revolution. Jiang Qing, a leading member of the CCRG, did not help matters when she promoted the orientation of "Attack by Reason, Defend by Force" (which she later publicly withdrew).¹⁶⁹ The rise in the level of violence in 1967 and 1968, especially in Guangdong, Sichuan, Guanxi and Shanxi¹⁷⁰ was serious enough for Mao to call it "all around civil war."¹⁷¹ This caused many people to withdraw from political life and made it impossible to undertake social transformations that were underway in other areas.

Another important period is routinely ignored in many accounts of the Cultural Revolution. While focusing on the alleged atrocities of the Cultural Revolution, they ignore the fact that Deng Xiaoping's coup in 1976 unleashed nationwide arrests and executions of revolutionaries in the CCP and the masses who awakened to political life during the Cultural Revolution and fought to keep China on the socialist road.

¹⁶⁸ Naihua Zhang in *Some of Us*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁹ Miltons, pp. 285-286.

¹⁷⁰ See William Hinton's *Shenfan*, 1983, for an account of the factional fighting in Shanxi in 1967.

¹⁷¹ Hinton, *Turning Point in China*, p. 17.

According to one account, immediately after the coup, hundreds of leaders who had come forward during the Cultural Revolution in Luoyang, an industrial city in Henan Province, were arrested, paraded in public and then disappeared. In the early 1980s, the new regime launched an even more extensive campaign of retaliation against former rebels. Government departments, factories and schools set up special offices to investigate charges of “crimes” committed during the Cultural Revolution. Tens of thousands of people lost their jobs and housing and many were imprisoned.¹⁷²

(5) One of the shortcomings of the Cultural Revolution that was most difficult to resolve was the inability of Mao and the leftists in the CCP to find the means to subject rightist commanders in the People’s Liberation Army to mass criticism, to ferret out their connections to revisionist forces outside the army, and to remove them from power where necessary.

Mao anticipated this problem, and tried to address it before the Cultural Revolution with a special educational campaign directed within the army. The first publication of the *Quotations of Chairman Mao Tsetung* was by the PLA, as an instrumental move to raise consciousness and to put revolutionary politics in command of military affairs. However, this was in the main pedagogy, not political struggle, and was not sufficient to inoculate against dangers that emerged in full force later.

During the Cultural Revolution, more than a few generals and ranking officers were tied to Liu, Deng and other rightist party leaders. In spite of instructions from Mao and the CCRG that they support the Left, some regional PLA commanders backed revisionist powerholders, effectively checking the advance and social transformations of the Cultural Revolution in those areas.¹⁷³

As described earlier, the development of widespread factional and at times armed struggle in 1967 left Mao and the new party leadership with no choice but to call out the PLA. To have called for the Cultural Revolution to be carried out in the military at this point would have risked splintering the PLA and civil war. In addition, the buildup of military forces by the U.S. south and east of China and by the Soviet Union to the north and west required vigilance by the PLA.¹⁷⁴ These threats practically exempted rightist military officers from the scrutiny and challenges and criticism which their counterparts and allies in the party were facing.

By 1969, the growing danger of a Soviet attack on China threw up another serious obstacle to conducting political movements in the PLA. This new situation favored military commanders who thought the Cultural Revolution should come to an end in order to focus on modernizing the armed forces and obtaining advanced weapons and technology from the Western imperialists.

¹⁷² Dongping Han, pp. 158-59.

¹⁷³ Meisner, pp. 334, 344; van Ginneken, p. 100.

¹⁷⁴ See Mao’s letter to the PLA dated January 27, 1967, in Jerome Ch’en, *Mao Papers: Anthology and Bibliography*, 1970, p. 135.

In spite of these obstacles, there was a great need to carry out the Cultural Revolution and make revolutionary transformations in the PLA after the acute danger of civil war had passed. This necessity became apparent in 1976. When the Chief of Staff of the PLA and other top commanders carried out the arrest of the Four, there was opposition to the coup in the militia in some areas, but virtually none in the PLA.

As long as socialist states face imperialist and hostile powers, they will need standing militaries for defensive purposes. But if ongoing political education, revolutionary transformations and mass campaigns against revisionism are not carried out in the armed forces of socialist states, the generals can accomplish from within what the imperialist armies have not yet been able to do from without—overthrow working class rule.

(6) In the course of the Cultural Revolution, the development of new revolutionary leadership in the top levels of the party was incomplete and it was difficult to consolidate. The downfall of Lin Biao, Mao's official successor as of 1969, the removal of the majority of the original members of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, and the turn to the right in the early 1970s by many party leaders and officials grouped around Zhou Enlai made it considerably easier for Deng Xiaoping and other leading revisionists overthrown during the earlier stages of the Cultural Revolution to make successful political comebacks.

Other than Mao himself, the Four—Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen, Yao Wenyuan and Jiang Qing—were the most prominent representatives of the leftist forces in the party who opposed Deng and defended the accomplishments of the Cultural Revolution. All of them had played a leading role in the Cultural Revolution's early upsurges. At the 10th Party Congress in 1973, Mao supported the Four for leading posts in the CCP; Wang became Vice-Chairman of the party, Zhang was on the five member Standing Committee of the Politburo, and Yao and Jiang were members of the Politburo.

According to a number of observers and scholars, the political strength of the Four was concentrated in Shanghai and a number of other cities, among lower and middle level cadre who joined the party during the mass upsurges of the Cultural Revolution, and in the fields of culture and propaganda-media. An indication of their support at higher levels can be found in the following figures: After their arrest in 1976, about one quarter of the Central Committee was purged, including 51 who had been mass leaders of the working class.¹⁷⁵

In assessing the role of the Four in the early 1970s, their promotion of leftist campaigns such as “Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius” and “Criticize Deng and Beat Back the Right Deviationist Wind”¹⁷⁶ are well known. Less is known about their policies for China's socialist transformation and how they put them into practice. In making an

¹⁷⁵ Lotta, p. 49.

¹⁷⁶ In 1975, Zhang wrote an influential article, “On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship Over the Bourgeoisie,” which argued that class struggle against the bourgeoisie in the party had to continue in order to keep China on the socialist road. <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/ARD75>

assessment it is important to remember that the Four's work was blocked and sabotaged at every turn by Deng and his supporters.

There has been some criticism of the methods of work of the Four even from supporters of the Cultural Revolution, which requires further investigation. For example, it is unclear whether Mao ever told them to stop acting like a “gang of four,” a claim made only after Mao's death in 1976 and the arrest of the Four.¹⁷⁷

The lack of a consolidated revolutionary leadership to succeed Mao that could beat back Deng's revisionist forces became very apparent as Mao's health declined sharply after 1972, when he had a stroke. He suffered from Lou Gehrig's Disease,¹⁷⁸ heart disease and anoxia (shortage of oxygen). Mao was also nearly blind, making it impossible for him to read and write documents without assistance, and he issued few major statements until his death.

The question of bringing forward new revolutionary leadership is part of the larger question of what it would have taken to turn back the rightist offensive in the early 1970s and keep China on the socialist road. This would have required a new revolutionary upsurge *among the masses*. It may have been impossible to conduct a struggle on the scale and intensity of the early years of the Cultural Revolution, but by the time a campaign to explicitly criticize Deng and his “general program” was launched in 1976, it was too late to turn it into a powerful revolutionary force.

Some have argued that Mao was too lenient with Deng and other revisionist leaders.¹⁷⁹ But it wasn't just Mao—the balance of forces in the leadership of the party had shifted sharply to the right. The fundamental issue, concerning which further investigation and discussion is needed, is how and the extent to which Mao and his leftist supporters waged what--as the rightist offensive got under way in the early 1970s--was a steep uphill battle to mobilize the masses and the revolutionary forces in the party to defend the achievements of the Cultural Revolution. This effort would have required targeting, removing and neutralizing the top party leaders who were taking China off the socialist road.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Mao's alleged statement first appeared in *People's Daily* on October 25, 1976. Jaap van Ginneken, *The Rise and Fall of Lin Biao*, 2nd ed., 1977, p. 303.

¹⁷⁸ This disease, technically called amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, caused the motor nerve cells to deteriorate in Mao's throat, pharynx, tongue, diaphragm, right hand and right leg. MacFarquhar, p. 414.

¹⁷⁹ Most researchers agree that Mao agreed to the rehabilitation of Deng in 1973. Mao may have thought that this was necessary to restore civilian control over the PLA in the wake of the Lin Biao affair. Mao may have later regretted this decision.

¹⁸⁰ As noted earlier, Premier Zhou Enlai had shifted to the right in the early 1970s. He was protecting and promoting Deng, and was himself attempting to reverse some of the most important gains of the Cultural Revolution. Since he had a considerable base of support in the party, government and among the masses, somewhat different tactics would have been required to expose his political line, his behind-the-scenes role in the rightist offensive, and to win over some of the middle forces.

(7) Visitors to China during the Cultural Revolution were struck by the presence of portraits of Mao wherever they went. The Chinese used them to decorate their homes, their bicycles and trucks, their workplaces, and placed Mao's pictures in their fields. Some observers have referred to this as a "personality cult" around Mao.

This view doesn't do justice to the relationship between Mao and the Chinese people. To them, Mao led the Communist Party of China in over two decades of revolutionary warfare to uproot the power of the landlords and the capitalists who had sold out China to the imperialist powers. He led the struggle to build socialism in China, which radically transformed the lives of 1/4 of humanity, and then called for a Cultural Revolution to keep China on the socialist road. All of this produced deep feelings of respect and even reverence among the Chinese people.

At the same time, visitors heard stories of people being praised for the number of Mao quotes they had memorized rather than for the way they had put them into practice. In a common picture, Mao appeared as a red sun shining his light down on the Chinese people. In contrast to the widespread iconization of Mao, more politically conscious forces stressed the study and application of Mao Zedong Thought to practice.

It was a political necessity for Mao to broadly promote his political views during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. As discussed earlier, by the mid-1960s China was being pulled off the socialist road, and Mao and his supporters were a minority in the party leadership. Thus, Mao used his revolutionary stature to appeal to the Chinese people above the heads of Liu, Deng and the other entrenched revisionists in the party and government. Study of Mao's works provided important ammunition for workers, peasants and students to stand up against revisionist party officials,¹⁸¹ and helped promote new economic, political and cultural initiatives. Later in the Cultural Revolution, Mao expressed his disapproval of these practices, which were toned down. Statues of Mao came down, and the ritual appellations of "Great Leader" and "Great Helmsman" which accompanied Mao's portraits disappeared.¹⁸²

Individual leaders such as Mao and Lenin have played a decisive role in charting a path to revolution and developing Marxist theory, but they haven't done this in isolation. Correct ideas are most effectively brought from and to the masses through the democratic centralist channels of a communist party with a tempered collective leadership.¹⁸³ This process also brings forward new revolutionary leaders. In a 1962 talk "On Democratic Centralism," Mao explained:

¹⁸¹ For a vivid example of how study of Mao's works promoted the empowerment of peasants and workers in Shandong Province, see Dongping Han, pp. 63-66.

¹⁸² Han Suyin, p. 340; Van Ginneken, p. 227.

¹⁸³ On this subject, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) writes: "We must develop collective leadership rather than focusing on any one individual or delegating revolutionary authority. Dependency on one or few individuals instead of developing collective leadership and involving the entire Party membership and the masses in decision-making has been one of the causes that led to great reversals in Russia and China where, after the demise of outstanding proletarian leaders like Stalin and Mao, the CPSU and the CPC turned revisionist so easily." "Exclusive

If there is no democracy we cannot possibly summarize experience correctly... Our leading organs merely play the role of a processing plant in the establishment of a good line and good general and specific policies and methods. Everyone knows that if a factory has no raw material it cannot do any processing. If the raw material is not adequate in quantity and quality it cannot produce good finished products. Without democracy, you have no understanding of what is happening down below; the situation will be unclear; you will be unable to collect sufficient opinions from all sides; there can be no communication between top and bottom; top-level organs of leadership will depend on one-sided and incorrect material to decide issues, thus you will find it difficult to avoid being subjectivist; it will be impossible to achieve unity of understanding and unity of action, and impossible to achieve true centralism... Our centralism is built on democratic foundations.”¹⁸⁴

(8) In the early 1970s, Mao, Zhou and most of the Chinese leadership advocated a “*three worlds*” perspective for Chinese foreign policy¹⁸⁵ that was a retreat from the revolutionary internationalist line followed earlier in the Cultural Revolution. According to this perspective, the two superpowers (the U.S. and the Soviet Union—“the first world”) were the principal enemies on a world scale; the Western imperialists and Japan (the “second world”) were part of an international united front against the superpowers; and the peoples *and countries* of the “third world” were the most reliable revolutionary force in opposing the superpowers. The view that the neo-colonial governments of the “third world” could be united with against the superpowers undermined the position (held by the CCP leadership earlier in the Cultural Revolution) that it was essential to provide aid to revolutionary movements in these countries.

As a perspective for the world’s revolutionary movement, the “three worlds” perspective had serious flaws.¹⁸⁶ It downplayed the reactionary nature of the other Western imperialist countries, and it created confusion about the nature of bourgeois

Interview with CPI (Maoist) Spokesperson on Nepal Developments,” p.12, posted at www.peoplesmarch.googlepages.com.

¹⁸⁴ Schram, p. 164. Also on www.marxists.org

¹⁸⁵ It is important to distinguish this perspective from Deng Xiaoping’s Three Worlds Theory. While Mao advocated *tactical* unity in some areas with the U.S. in order to deal with the Soviet threat to China, Deng sought to implement a *strategic* alliance and political understanding with U.S. imperialism.

¹⁸⁶ In the early 1970’s, this perspective also included the view that the Soviet Union was the “main danger” in the world—that is, it was more dangerous than U.S. imperialism. This position was justified by historical parallels to World War 2, when the Soviet Union made an alliance with the Western imperialist countries against German imperialism. This line was not simply a necessary tactic to defend socialism in the USSR, but was a general strategy imposed on the international communist movement by the Soviet leadership through the Comintern. Just as in the China in the 1970s, this line of identifying one bloc of imperialists as more dangerous than an opposing bloc encouraged class collaboration on the part of communists in the US, France, Italy, and Britain, as well as in their colonies such as India, Algeria and the Philippines.

nationalist regimes in Asia, Africa and Latin America.¹⁸⁷ Emphasis on economic development in these countries and their disputes with the U.S. obscured the neo-colonial relations that persisted.

The issues raised by the Three Worlds Theory remain crucial today. Similar sentiments are heard about the central importance of struggles for national sovereignty—referring to Venezuela, Bolivia, Iran, Zimbabwe and a number of other countries. They should be defended against attacks by the U.S. or by other imperialist partners, surrogates, or emerging blocs. However, it is important to understand that these countries---even if led by social-democrats like Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales—are still caught in the web of imperialist economic relations. According to James Petras:

Venezuela, Bolivia and the entire spectrum of social movements, trade union confederations, parties and fractions of parties do not call for the abolition of capitalism, the repudiation of the debt, the complete expropriation of US or EEC banks or multinational corporations, or any rupture in relations with the US. For example, in Venezuela, private national and foreign banks earned over 30% rate of return in 2005-2006, foreign-owned oil companies reaped record profits between 2004-2006 and less than 1% of the biggest landed estates were fully expropriated and titles turned over to landless peasants. Capital-labor relations still operate in a framework heavily weighted on behalf of business and labor contractors who rely on subcontractors who continue to dominate hiring and firing in more than one half of the large enterprises. The Venezuelan military and police continue to arrest suspected Colombian guerrillas and turn them over to the Colombian police. Venezuela and US-client President Uribe of Colombia have signed several high-level security and economic co-operation agreements.¹⁸⁸

While these countries may implement progressive reforms--and even some features of a social welfare state with enough oil revenues-- this is not a substitute for the development of a mass-based revolutionary movement, which as history shows, is the only pathway to socialism.

Putting aside the relative strength and thoroughness of the various bourgeois nationalist opponents of U.S. imperialism today, there is a widely held view that nationalist governments and their leaders, not people's movements, are the *most* important challenge to imperialism. This is cause for some forces to deny support for people's movements within these countries, such as Iran, Zimbabwe and Brasil. With the

¹⁸⁷ Some of the problems with this perspective were reflected in a widely quoted statement by Mao, "Countries want independence, nations want liberation, and the people want revolution." This statement is eclectic, in that it places the struggles of Third World countries for national independence on a par with revolutionary movements in the oppressed nations.

¹⁸⁸ See James Petras, "US-Latin American Relations: Measuring the Rise or Fall of US Power," November 1, 2006, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article15464.htm>, In the second half of this article, Petras discusses Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a somewhat different question due to its particular history and claims to be a socialist state. The DPRK, too, is increasingly dependent on nearby capitalist countries, South Korea and China, for food and energy assistance, and by means of investment in maquiladora-like economic zones similar to those in China.

U.S. imperialists threatening to launch a military attack on the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is essential to extend our solidarity to the Iranian people, not to the reactionary mullahs.

The fixation with great nationalist leaders is, for anti-imperialists, myopic and invites disaster. The way such leaders have been cut down by imperialism in the past is rarely discussed, though such examples are many and the parallels cogent—Arbenz in Guatemala, Mossadegh in Iran, Lumumba in the Congo, Sukarno in Indonesia, Nkrumah in Ghana, and Allende in Chile. And turning a blind eye to Maoist-led people's wars and liberation movements is to deny, or fail to recognize, the very forces that stand the best chance to open a new revolutionary dynamic in the 21st century.

H. Conceptualizing Socialist Society

Continuing study of the Cultural Revolution has produced a number of thought-provoking proposals from Maoist parties and friends of socialist China about how socialist societies should be organized in the future. These proposals focus on the relationship between the party and the masses of people, and on democratic forms of organization.

We welcome efforts to look freshly at a variety of political and organizational mechanisms that may help resolve some of the complex and challenging problems that arise under socialism. However, it is important to understand that there are those who think it is necessary to discard the whole project of advancing along the socialist road to communism because, they say, it isn't "democratic" enough. In contrast, there are many revolutionary and communist forces around the world that continue to embrace this project and are gathering forces for the next round of revolution and socialism. In the course of this, new understandings of socialism will be forged, making important additions to the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist understanding of how to change the world.

(1) Some Important Understandings of the Nature of Socialism

A fundamental part of departure is the understanding that it is working class rule--the dictatorship of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie--that makes it possible for the vast majority of people to have real political rights, especially the power to continue to transform socialist society in their collective interest.

As indicated by statements such as "Hitler was a dictator," in everyday language the word dictator is often used to refer to a person who has the power to rule over society.. For Marxists, however, the main characteristics of any society are shaped by *relations among classes*, not among individuals. All societies are dictatorships insofar as one class rules in its own interests.

Within the ruling class there is democracy because there can be considerable debate

among its members, who have meaningful opportunities to influence what the state does. But the capitalist state exercises dictatorship over members of other classes, who lack comparable opportunities to influence what the state does.¹⁸⁹ More importantly, the capitalist state protects existing property relations and suppresses, frequently violently, serious challenges to these relations and to its rule.

Thus, a “democracy for all,” regardless of class, can have meaning only in a society which has evolved beyond classes and beyond exploitation of one class by another. States, which have evolved to promote, defend, and enforce class interests, will vanish, and other forms of organization will develop to manage and coordinate the workings of society.

Even among many political activists, there is a common misunderstanding that the dictatorship *of* the proletariat *over* the bourgeoisie is in reality not an unleashing of the heretofore pent-up capacity of the working masses, but is instead a dictatorship of a communist party *over* the masses of people, and that any form of dictatorship is incompatible with democratic forms of organization under socialism.

This view stands in contrast to a fundamental truth: The history of the modern state has shown that all states have a class character, which promotes the interests of a particular class against (in open or disguised form) other classes. Yet the prolonged struggle against bourgeois or capitalist dictatorship, in its more repressive or less repressive forms, has brought forth many political movements which aim to reform the bourgeois state until it becomes, without revolution, a truly democratic-for-all state which no longer expresses the interests of any particular class. This is an illusory pursuit, developed by the relatively privileged, which denies the necessity for *revolutionary* opposition to bourgeois rule.

Socialist states must have armed forces—and use them when necessary—in order to defend themselves against external enemies and prevent the overthrown bourgeoisie from making a comeback. However, the dictatorship of the proletariat is not simply the operation of the state apparatus. It is a dynamic process that continues throughout the socialist transition period, in which millions of working people develop higher levels of political consciousness, knowledge and organization that enable them to exercise ever-increasing and effective power over state affairs, the economy, education, culture and foreign policy. In this process all classes, from the peasantry to the privileged, will increasingly be drawn into the productive daily work of society and thereby proletarianized. Through this long period of socialism, mental and manual work will be increasingly shouldered by all.

Evaluating the history of socialism, especially the extensive experience of the Soviet Union and of the People’s Republic of China, is an essential precondition for weighing the new proposals now being made by various parties and individuals. In looking at how socialist society will be organized in the future, several related questions should be posed.

¹⁸⁹ As Lenin once put it, under democracy for the bourgeoisie, the people have the right to choose which pre-selected candidates of the ruling class will oppress them for the following years.

Do these proposals strengthen the ability of the leading communist party to constantly renew its revolutionary character? Do they raise the political consciousness of the masses and strengthen their ability to distinguish between the socialist and capitalist roads? Will they restrict to the maximum extent possible the class differences and inequalities in socialist society? Do they promote the ability of the masses to supervise and point out defects in the party's work? Do they promote the understanding that socialism cannot advance in one or more countries without actively supporting the development of struggles to overthrow capitalism and imperialism around the world? On such questions the development of socialism today is often focused and debated.

In the history of the international communist movement, it must be remembered that two major and widespread assumptions of the Soviet period have proven untenable. The first is that the revolutionary seizure of working class state power ushers in the ending of class struggle. Instead, the class struggle under the dictatorship of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie has been shown to be more intense and complex in the socialist period, which is best understood as a transitional period between capitalist rule and the dawning of a global classless society: communism.

The second assumption that has proven untenable is that history is progressive and irreversible. Once an essential part of Stalin's formulation of dialectical and historical materialism, the reversals and capitalist restorations in the Soviet Union and in China have provided dramatic proof that a far more dynamic model involving wave upon wave of mass initiative is required. Hence, the need to understand that periods of intense class struggle such as the Cultural Revolution are indispensable, They propel and enrich these revolutionary transformations along the socialist road to communism.

(2) The Role of Mass Organizations

The disbanding of many mass organizations in China in the fall of 1967, in order to put a halt to factional fighting, continues to be a controversial one. Some scholars and activists argue that independent workers organizations and unions were an essential means for the working class to exercise political supervision over the party during the Cultural Revolution, and this must be an important feature of socialist societies in the future.

In a paper presented at a China Study Group-and Monthly Review-sponsored conference in Hong Kong in June 2006 on the 40th Anniversary of the Cultural Revolution titled "Rethinking the Legacy and Genealogy of the Cultural Revolution," Fred Engst, a lifelong China scholar, stated that it was a mistake to dissolve the mass organizations. Another scholar and friend of revolutionary China, Professor Joel Andreas, argued that instead of calling for power seizures along the lines of the January Storm in Shanghai, Mao should have called on rebel workers to seize power in the unions,

converting the unions into independent mass organizations that could undertake effective mass supervision of the party.¹⁹⁰

We agree that mass organizations of workers, women, oppressed nationalities and other sectors have an important--indeed, essential--role to play in socialist society, particularly in allowing and ensuring broad and open debate to take place concerning party policies, and in bringing forward new revolutionary leaders from the masses and reinvigorating the party.

However two issues must be considered. First, while they should not be appendages of the party, if such mass organizations oppose the socialist system, any progressive role they might play will be undermined or short-circuited. Second, in order to play their role, mass organizations will be arenas of discussion and struggle between party members and non-party sections of the masses with different levels of political consciousness.

(3) The Role of Dissent and Mass Debate

In socialist society, people must have the right to criticize and supervise the party and its policies. A Communist Party does not hold a monopoly on truth; often minority ideas will be proven correct. Dissenting views should be brought out into the open, where the masses of people can challenge and defend party policies.

However, dissent is not just a question of individual rights in socialist society. It is one part of a fundamental change in class relations--the unleashing of debates, criticism and mass initiatives among the working people who were suppressed and oppressed in the old capitalist societies. Through this process, working people, whether proletarian or peasant, will learn and master the issues involved in remaking society and the world.

Another aspect of the role of dissent, which is usually the sole focus of critics, is the relationship of privileged classes and intellectuals to the new socialist society. Here the question is very contradictory. On the one hand, socialism needs to bring the skills and knowledge of the traditionally privileged into the process of developing the new society. It needs to enlist them and urge them forward as part of the new world being created. It also needs to struggle with them, so they join this process rather than keeping, as many do, to personal gain and power as their motive. In time, many of the privileged intelligentsia will join the working class, in both the productive labor of socialist economics, and in shaping the health, education, culture and media of socialism. Only in this process are new class relations brought into being. In this way, the centuries-old division between mental work and manual work is repeatedly challenged and finally put to rest.

Engaging these various forces means encouraging debate and dissent but also checking efforts to sabotage the socialist system. Experience has shown that, in the main,

¹⁹⁰ These papers will be posted at www.chinastudygroup.org. A report on the conference can be found at <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/magdoff010706.html>

such checks are best made by the masses of working people who must learn to lead society. And while that process is led by a communist party, history also shows that bureaucratic attempts to suppress dissent not only prove futile in defending socialism in the long run, but they also prevent the masses from coming forward in the struggle and from thereby moving society forward.¹⁹¹

(4) The Hundred Flowers and Anti-Rightist Campaigns of 1956-57

The campaign to “Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend” and the subsequent Anti-Rightist campaign were precursors to the Cultural Revolution in many respects. Mao had been advocating the Hundred Flowers idea since 1951, but it was not formally launched until 1956 when he further developed his thinking on how to handle contradictions among the people. The early stages of the Hundred Flowers campaign brought out criticism of party members’ bureaucratic practices, but later on it led to an escalation of political struggle between the CCP and an aggressively anti-socialist group of intellectuals.

As China’s socialist transformation was accelerating in the mid-1950s, the CCP was confronted by a vexing problem. There was a need to enlist China’s intellectuals, scientists and engineers in this process, but the vast majority of them had been trained in the old society.¹⁹² According to Mao, only 10% out of China’s five million intellectuals firmly supported the party and socialism. Thus, there was a pressing need both to unite with the intelligentsia in practical work *and* to find the ways to develop their political outlook.

One problem was overly strict controls on intellectuals by party officials. Mao wrote in 1957:

¹⁹¹ Much of the historic terms of this still-unfolding debate was contained in the historic polemic over the summation of Stalin and the period of his leadership of the Soviet Union. As it emerged, this polemic, which lasted from 1956 until 1964, became a sharp articulation of fundamental differences between revisionist renunciation of Stalin and, by extension, socialism in the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and revolutionary Marxism-Leninism, which upheld the dictatorship of the proletariat even while developing criticisms of Stalin and his methods of leadership, on the other. At the same time, Mao developed new ways to unleash mass initiative in the Hundred Flowers campaign, the Great Leap Forward, the Socialist Education Movement, and especially in the Cultural Revolution.

Some of the basic elements of this debate are contained in Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” attacking Stalin at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956; and “On the Question of Stalin” in 1963, <http://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/polemic/qstalin.htm> (one of a series of articles by the CPC challenging Soviet revisionism entitled *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement*); and in Mao’s “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People” in 1957.

http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm

¹⁹² In addition, more than 80% of the university students were children of intellectuals, capitalists, landlords and rich peasants.

We think that it is harmful to the growth of art and science if administrative measures are used to impose one particular style of art or school of thought and to ban another. Questions of right and wrong in the arts and science should be settled through free discussion in artistic and scientific circles and through practical work in these fields.... Often, correct and good things were first regarded not as fragrant flowers but as poisonous weeds. Copernicus' theory of the solar system and Darwin's theory of evolution were once dismissed as erroneous and had to win out over bitter opposition. Chinese history offers many similar examples. In a socialist society, the conditions for the growth of the new are radically different from and far superior to those in the old society.¹⁹³

Mao recognized that bureaucratic and commandist tendencies were growing in the CCP, and he called for a rectification campaign within the party in 1957 to address this problem. He did not see scattered student agitation as well as a number of strikes and protests on agricultural cooperatives in 1956 and early 1957 as altogether negative. Many of these “disturbances” were the product of bureaucratic methods of work by party cadre and lack of political education: “When disturbances do occur as a result of poor work on our part, then we should guide those involved onto the correct path, use the disturbances as a special means for improving our work and educating the cadres and the masses, and find solutions to those problems which were previously left unsolved.”¹⁹⁴ This thrust was initially opposed by some in the CCP leadership, notably Liu Shaoqi and Peng Chen, the mayor of Beijing.¹⁹⁵

In the spring of 1957, the Hundred Flowers campaign peaked. Some intellectuals attacked the work style and privileges of party leaders, the lack of preventive medicine for the masses, and the neglect of the countryside. Others criticized the “blind imitation” of Soviet theories and techniques in science and industry. Students started to criticize formalistic methods of teaching in *dazibaos* on the walls of universities and classrooms in Beijing.¹⁹⁶

Mao argued that the party did not possess a monopoly on correct ideas and therefore was subject to criticism from outside its ranks. In a speech in 1957 to party cadre, Mao stated that Marxists are not afraid of criticism: ¹⁹⁷ “For a party as much as for

¹⁹³ “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People,” Section VIII, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/index.htm>

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Section IX.

¹⁹⁵ Han Suyin, p. 100.

¹⁹⁶ Meisner, pp. 177, 179.

¹⁹⁷ Mao continued, “At this time, to bring up the problem of being afraid of criticism is simply an indication that you have weaknesses. Their weak aspects should all be criticized; regardless of what kind of cadre or government is involved, shortcomings and errors should be criticized. Moreover, this should become a habit; the people’s government should make this a habit... If the criticism is correct, of course, it’s good. If the criticism is incorrect, then of course it doesn’t matter.... In matters that fall within the purview of the people, the people should have the right to criticize. We deny this right only to counter-revolutionaries. The provisions in the Constitution should be enforced; this includes the freedom of speech, assembly, association and publication.” “Concluding Remarks at the Supreme State Conference,” March 1, 1957, in *The Writings of Mao*

an individual,” Mao wrote, “there is a great need to hear opinions different from its own.”¹⁹⁸ Correct ideas cannot be developed and sharpened without discussion and struggle against incorrect ideas.¹⁹⁹ This is illustrated by the following example. In 1957, Mao suggested that the circulation of the newspaper *Reference News* be expanded from 2,000 to 400,000 copies. *Reference News* was an uncensored compilation of articles with an overtly capitalist viewpoint from the overseas press. Most copies went not to individuals, but to work units, where they were passed around. Mao explained,

The purpose of this is to put non-Marxist things and poisonous weeds in front of the comrades and the non-Party people so as to temper everyone. Otherwise they will know Marxism and nothing else, and that wouldn't be good. It is like a smallpox vaccination which causes struggle inside the human body and produces immunity.”²⁰⁰

Mao was not saying that “anything goes”—that incorrect views that sprouted in the course of the Hundred Flowers campaign should not be criticized. In *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, Mao put forward six criteria to help the masses of people distinguish between “fragrant flowers” and “poisonous weeds”:

- (1) Words and deeds should help to unite, and not divide, the people of all our nationalities.
- (2) They should be beneficial, and not harmful, to socialist transformation and socialist construction.
- (3) They should help to consolidate, and not undermine or weaken, the people's democratic dictatorship.
- (4) They should help to consolidate, and not undermine or weaken, democratic centralism.
- (5) They should help to strengthen, and not shake off or weaken, the leadership of the Communist Party.
- (6) They should be beneficial, and not harmful, to international socialist unity and the unity of the peace-loving people of the world.

Of these six criteria, the most important are the two about the socialist path and the leadership of the Party. These criteria are put forward not to hinder but to foster the free discussion of questions among the people. Those who disapprove these criteria can still state their own views and argue their case.

Zedong: 1949-1976, Volume II: January 1956-December 1957, eds., John Leung and Michael Kau, 1992, pp. 352-53.

¹⁹⁸ Meisner, p. 172.

¹⁹⁹ Mao bluntly described his approach to those holding incorrect views: “If they have to fart, let them fart. It's more beneficial to us if they fart; let everybody smell it and see whether it smells good or stinks; then through discussion, we can win over the majority and isolate those people.” “Speech at the Conference of Provincial, Municipal, and Autonomous Region Party Secretaries,” January 27, 1957, *Ibid.*, pp. 260-61.

²⁰⁰ January 1957 address to a meeting of party secretaries, in Feigon, p. 114. A slightly different translation can be found at http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_57.htm#v5_87

However, so long as the majority of the people have clear-cut criteria to go by, criticism and self-criticism can be conducted along proper lines, and these criteria can be applied to people's words and deeds to determine whether they are right or wrong, whether they are fragrant flowers or poisonous weeds.

These are political criteria. Naturally, to judge the validity of scientific theories or assess the aesthetic value of works of art, other relevant criteria are needed. But these six political criteria are applicable to all activities in the arts and sciences. In a socialist country like ours, can there possibly be any useful scientific or artistic activity which runs counter to these political criteria?²⁰¹

As the Hundred Flowers campaign gathered force, a small section of the intelligentsia, estimated at 50,000, was emboldened by the pro-Western Hungarian uprising in the fall of 1956, and by Khrushchev's secret speech attacking Stalin and socialism in the Soviet Union, to publicly attack the leading role of the CCP. Two of the leaders of the democratic parties, Zhang Bojun and Luo Longji, advocated a Western-style parliamentary system and called for the separation of the party from the government. Some intellectuals formed groups like the Hungarian Petofi Club with the hope of stimulating a revolt to overthrow socialism in China. Moreover, by early June 1957, sections of the student movement were occupying university offices, attacking government and party offices, and taking school and party officials hostage.²⁰² Thus, rightists among the students and intellectuals were using the Hundred Flowers campaign to actively organize people to oppose the socialist state.

In July 1957, Mao and the party leadership responded with the Anti-Rightist campaign, which raged for several months. The party press, spearheaded by editorials in *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) that are thought to have been written by Mao, focused its attack on Zhang, Luo and their supporters. Party-led students and factory workers denounced the anti-socialist views of the rightist forces.

This was an intense period of class struggle between the proletariat and the old bourgeoisie. While a relatively small number of people publicly attacked the party and socialism, they represented larger numbers of bourgeois intellectuals and students and some among the workers and peasants. Seven years after Liberation, Mao estimated that 10% of the population, or 60 million people, did not approve of the socialist system.

An important part of the Hundred Flowers and Anti-Rightist campaign was to bring this section of the population out into the open so they could be struggled with politically. As a direct result of these campaigns, millions of people, including more intellectuals and scientists were won over to support for socialism, and diehard rightists were isolated and silenced. At the same time, while Mao sought to differentiate between "well-intentioned criticisms on the part of the broad masses and the anti-socialist

²⁰¹ "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People," Section VIII, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5

²⁰² Meisner, p. 180.

criticisms by a small group of rightists,” some critics of the party who were not anti-socialist rightists suffered during the course of the Anti-Rightist campaign.

These campaigns led to political innovations, many of which were later adopted and developed further in the Cultural Revolution. In 1957 and 1958, 800,000 party cadre and one million students were sent to the countryside for periods of time to integrate more closely with workers and peasants. In addition, a new Maoist policy was adopted that full-time cadre at the lower levels would participate in manual labor in their work units.²⁰³ Finally, struggle against rightist trends within the CCP opened the way to the call for the radical economic and social transformations of the Great Leap Forward.

Many critics of Mao claim that the 100 Flowers campaign was a cynical move by the CCP to first encourage the intellectuals to speak out, and then pounce on them and suppress any criticism of the party. In fact, the 100 Flowers campaign was launched to win over millions of intellectuals to socialism, which included mutual struggle and criticism between the party and the intellectuals. But in the course of this movement, a relatively small number of intellectuals who were seeking to sabotage progress towards socialism jumped out. At that point, different means of political struggle became necessary. But even here, Mao mobilized the masses to criticize and struggle against these rightists, instead of relying on administrative measures to crush dissent. In this way Mao was breaking with Stalin’s method of handling political differences between the people and the party.²⁰⁴

In these campaigns, Mao was trying to find the means to bring forward the political initiative of the masses of people to advance along the socialist road, to foster widespread debate in order to sort out incorrect from correct ideas, and to enable the masses to criticize bourgeois ideas and practices in the party. Over the next ten years, Mao’s understanding of the necessary means to conduct class struggle in socialist society would deepen,²⁰⁵ and would result in his call for the Cultural Revolution.

²⁰³ Han Suyin, *Wind in the Tower*, p. 105.

²⁰⁴ Mao’s assessment of Stalin’s leadership from the 1920s to the 1950s was that he was 70% correct and 30% incorrect. However, he had some harsh words for Stalin in a speech at a party conference in Nanjing in the spring of 1957: “Stalin would not allow for criticism. He was afraid of people who wanted to criticize, of letting a hundred flowers bloom. He would only allow for the blooming of fragrant flowers. He was afraid also of letting a hundred schools contend. At the slightest hint of suspicion, he would say that it was a counter-revolutionary incident and would have people arrested or executed. This is to confuse the two types of contradictions, to mistake the contradictions among the people for contradictions between the enemy and ourselves.”

After describing an incident involving students who had brought a petition to a party leader in Nanjing and had yelled, “Down with bureaucratism” and wanted certain problems resolved, Mao commented, “As I see it, if these were brought in front of Stalin, I think a few heads would surely have rolled. “On the Problem of Ideological Work,” March 20, 1957, in Leung and Kau, p. 440.

²⁰⁵ By the Third Plenum of the 8th Central Committee held in October 1957, Mao stated that the primary contradiction in socialist society is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which is sharply expressed in the areas of politics and ideology. Mao thereby challenged the position championed by Liu and Deng and adopted at the 8th Congress in 1956 that the primary contradiction was between the backward productive forces and the advanced social system. This was the theoretical basis for the revisionist theory that the development of the economy (meaning:

(5) The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) on Multi-Party Competition

These issues of dissent, how to handle contradictions among the people, and mass workers organizations independent of party control have some similarities to the proposal of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to organize political competition in socialist society, as well as in the new democratic stage of the revolution that precedes it in neo-colonial countries. A 2003 CPN(M) document explains that, in the “traditional view”:

There is either no opportunity, or it is not prepared, or it is prohibited, for the masses to have a free democratic or socialist competition against [the Party]. As a result, since the ruling Party is not required to have a political competition with others amidst the masses, it gradually turns into a mechanistic bureaucratic Party with special privileges, and the state under its leadership, too, turns into a mechanistic and bureaucratic machinery....

Only by institutionalizing the rights of the masses to install an alternative revolutionary Party or leadership on the state if the Party fails to continuously revolutionize itself, can counter-revolution be effectively checked. Among different anti-feudal and anti-imperialist political parties, organizations and institutions which accept the constitutional provisions of the democratic state, their mutual relations should not be confined to that of a mechanistic relation of cooperation with the Communist Party, but should be stressed to have dialectical relations of democratic political competition in the service of the people.²⁰⁶

While we agree that other political parties may be able to play a positive role under new democracy (and perhaps, under socialism), there are two significant problems with this concept. First, we disagree with the CPN(M)'s claim that the capitalist restorations in the Soviet Union and China were the result of a lack of political competition with the Communist Party, and that other parties could have served as an alternative for the masses to rescue socialism. This is an idealist and institutional solution to deeper political problems concerning the role of bourgeois forces ensconced within the communist party and the forms of mass participation in socialist society.

Secondly, discussion of this issue is greatly complicated by the fact that the CPN(M) has simultaneously developed this position and unfolded its new political strategy, which envisions replacing the monarchy with a bourgeois democratic system of peaceful competition among itself and several parties which represent the interests of the feudal and bourgeois ruling classes in Nepal. After ten years of successfully waging protracted people's war and building institutions for people's power in liberated areas over 85% of Nepal, the leadership of the CPN(M) apparently blinked, and adopted a totally contrary strategy, promoting a Western-style bourgeois democracy.

building the productive forces) was the primary task in socialism and the advance to communism—and *not* the ever-more-thorough transformation of the relations of production.

²⁰⁶ "Present Situation And Our Historical Task," *The Worker* #9, p. 63, Section "On the State." <http://cpnm.org/new/English/worker/9issue/document.htm>

This strategy reached a decisive turning point with the signing of a peace agreement in November 2006 between the CPN(M) and seven parliamentary parties which calls for elections to a Constituent Assembly in mid-2007. According to the CPN(M), this system will continue for an unspecified (but lengthy) period of time. Eventually, they argue, there *may* be a peaceful transition to new democracy and socialism.²⁰⁷

In fact, this new system of peaceful competition with reactionary parties will never reach the stage of new democracy in a country like Nepal, much less socialism.²⁰⁸ While all revolutions require tactical compromises and tactical coalitions, successful revolutions have not abandoned their independence and the instruments of mass political and military initiative. To win socialist political power, historical experience indicates that it is necessary for the communist party to develop organizations of popular political power and to wage armed struggle to overthrow and uproot the old state apparatus, especially the reactionary army. In Nepal, such organs of people's power, including the people's liberation army, are being disbanded with the adoption of this new political strategy--and declared abandoned for the future, as well.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ See (1) the interview with CPN(M) Chairman Prachanda in *The Worker #10*, page 40 <http://nepal.singlespark.org> and (2) the November 2006 peace agreement between the CPN(M) and the seven parliamentary parties that calls for dissolving the CPN(M)'s organizations of political power in the countryside and merging the Maoist People's Liberation Army with the Nepalese Army. www.nepalnews.com/archive/2006/nov/nov08/news01.php

²⁰⁸ The struggle against the revisionist line of the illusory "peaceful transition" is not abstract or doctrinaire. It has been paid for with the blood of the millions who needlessly died—disarmed by the "peaceful road"—at the hands of reactionary generals in Indonesia in 1965 and Chile in 1973. That line has also seen its bitter fruit in the range of trends, from the Tupamaros of Uruguay and the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and the South African Communist Party, who each in their own way disarmed the people, abandoned their socialist goals, reached for the carrot of shared power, made their peace with capital, and left a legacy of dashed hopes and disarray among millions who remain trapped in oppressive relations. Fortunately, in the mountains of the Philippines and Turkey's Kurdistan, in the liberated zones of Andhra Pradesh, and in the *favelas* of Brazil, a different story is being told.

At the same time, this must not be taken as endorsement of all who have taken up arms. The misapplication of armed struggle and guerilla warfare by many militant groups to times and conditions which are not yet revolutionary, or which substitute themselves politically and militarily for the masses, or which in the course of favorable conditions nonetheless pursue a flawed or poorly focused strategy which targets potential friends and allies and fails to isolate the people's enemies, have all taken serious negative tolls. Such experience also needs summation, but this subject is beyond the scope of this paper.

²⁰⁹ In recent years, the hopes of many revolutionaries and supporters of liberation movements soared with news of each advance of the Nepalese revolution. The course the CPN(M) is now following, and which it argues is *universal* and should be applied elsewhere as well, has created consternation among many, even while various revisionist "parliamentary socialists" in different countries have praised the turn of strategy. While the revolutionaries in Nepal will undoubtedly struggle over these questions of strategy and come to different conclusions over time, the discussion and debate will also grow internationally. Internationalism requires learning from the circumstances faced by the revolution in Nepal, as well as carefully examining changes in basic principles.

(6) The Communist Party of India (Maoist) on Socialist Society

In mid-2006, the Communist Party of India (Maoist)--perhaps the largest Maoist party in the world today--released a statement in which it criticized the CPN(M)'s political strategy.²¹⁰ It also took issue with the conception of multi-party political competition under socialism:

The crucial point lies not in ensuring the right of the masses to replace one Party by another through elections, which is anyway the norm in any bourgeois republic or bureaucratic-feudal republic, but ensuring their active and creative involvement in supervising the Party and the state, in checking the emergence of a new bureaucratic class, and themselves taking part in the administration of the state and society and in the entire process of revolutionary transformation. And it will be the foremost task of the Party to organize and lead the masses in checking counter-revolution and bringing about the revolutionary transformation in all spheres through continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. And this is the most important lesson handed down to us by the entire historical experience of the world revolution, particularly by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution....

The Marxist-Leninist-Maoist understanding regarding the form of government that will be best suited for the proletariat is the Commune or the Soviet or the Revolutionary Council [Revolutionary Committee] as they act not as talking shops and mere legislative bodies but as both legislative and executive bodies. The representatives to these bodies are elected and are subject to recall any time the people feel they do not serve their interests.... If we look at the very process of the protracted people's war, it entails setting up democratic power in the Base Areas of all anti-imperialist and anti-feudal forces under the leadership of the proletariat elected democratically at gram sabhas with the right to remove them also by the gram sabha. Here there is a close interaction between the power structures and the will of the people and therefore truly democratic.²¹¹

After the transition to socialism, the CPI (Maoist) states that "It is difficult to grasp how alternative revolutionary parties can exist—especially since the communist parties have always understood that different political lines represented either a proletarian outlook or a bourgeois outlook." It also points to the danger of allowing the

A historical bibliography has been developed which may be useful in sorting out the various questions: *Assessing Recent Developments in Nepal: Bibliography on the State, a Peaceful Transition to Socialism, Democracy and Dictatorship, Negotiations and Their Relevance to the International Communist Movement in the 21st Century* -- by the MLM Revolutionary Study Group in the U.S. (January 3, 2007) Write mlm.rsg@gmail.com to request a copy.

²¹⁰ The June-July 2006 issue of *People's March* contains an interview with the spokesperson of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), which makes a detailed criticism of the CPN(M)'s political direction. (www.peoplesmarch.googlepages.com) This interview was followed by a statement in November 2006 by the CPI (Maoist) Central Committee which made further points about the CPN(M)'s strategy, including its demobilization of the People's Liberation Army. www.singlespark.org/?id=Azad2006Nov13.

²¹¹ www.peoplesmarch.googlepages.com, pp. 5-8.

defeated classes to regain power peacefully or by a coup if they have an opportunity to “compete in a ‘democratic’ manner.”²¹²

(7) Summing Up

In our view, the ability of socialism to thrive and advance towards communism involves several dialectically-related tasks. The principal tasks are to keep the Communist Party revolutionary; to continually unleash the initiative of the masses of working people to strengthen their ability to rule—to master the complex questions involved in running the economy, education, culture, international affairs and other areas of society; to thoroughly transform the relations of production²¹³ and social relations²¹⁴; to restrict the operation of the law of value²¹⁵ and of bourgeois right²¹⁶; to proletarianize

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ “*Transforming the relations of production*” refers to changes in all three parts of the relations of production—in ownership, in the division of labor (including management and decision-making, mental/manual labor, training and special programs to overcome traditional privileges and discrimination), and in the distribution of goods and wealth.

²¹⁴ “*Transforming the social relations*” refer to changes in the relationships between people in society, including the broad range of inequalities in accessing and wielding power, wealth, education, culture and influence. Such inequalities are often described in terms of class, caste, gender, ethnic and national/national minority, city vs. countryside, and mental and manual labor. In *The Class Struggles in France: 1848-1850*, Marx referred to these unequal social relations when he wrote that the transition to communism requires the abolition of the Four Alls: “the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the *social relations* that correspond to these relations of production, and to the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations.”

²¹⁵ “*Restricting the operation of the law of value*” refers to the repeated and ongoing struggles under socialism to re-orient economic production from seeking the highest return on investment in the marketplace, to addressing social needs and concerns. This re-prioritization of production is done through various mechanisms-- quotas for necessary goods; stimulating and subsidizing the production of goods and services which are not profitable, but which are necessary for the social and political goals of socialism; curtailing production of highly profitable luxury goods; and waging political campaigns to enlist broad volunteerism for special projects as well as on an ongoing basis. Examples may be everything from the subsidizing of school and hospital construction, or producing food products to overcome malnutrition in rural areas; and production of educational materials and other material support needed by revolutionary struggles in other countries. This also requires sharply focused struggle to combat the line that everything should be reoriented to profitable production. Through repeated campaigns on these issues, the entire society becomes involved in the reorientation of production to meet social needs and goals.

²¹⁶ “*Restricting bourgeois right*” refers to transformations that narrow differences in wealth and social resources from capitalism to socialism to communism. Under capitalism, most of the wealth gained from the production and distribution of goods goes to the owners of capital, and only secondarily to the maintenance and reproduction of the workers who have produced the wealth. The socialist revolution re-directs this wealth to the producers themselves, so that now,

all classes in society²¹⁷; and to be a firm support and nourishment for revolution throughout the world.

Working people cannot rise to these challenges and make new advances under socialism if their world outlook remains the same. As people learn to express themselves and organize in various political formations, they will find that this is not only a right, but a responsibility.

An essential point is that a socialist society cannot stay on the socialist road without a leading Communist Party that maintains a revolutionary orientation. As the experiences in the Soviet Union and China demonstrate, if this is lost, the proletariat loses state power. The party is decisive because of its role directing the political and economic trajectory of the society. Therefore, the party's internal life must be characterized by vigorous political struggle against bourgeois ideology, against the development of new bourgeois elements in the party, and by the encouragement of critical thinking within the

for the first time, workers receive most of what they have produced. This is referred to as “from each according to their ability, to each according to their labor,” which is a great advance over capitalism. But this still contains many inequalities. Because workers possess greatly different capabilities both physically and technically, they have the right to receive payment at different rates according to the different values of their labor, and can therefore accumulate wealth at different rates. This is often referred to as “bourgeois right” because it rewards and reinforces self-interest, not collective interest, as the motivation for labor. It becomes the harbinger of unequal accumulation of both material and social resources, including decision making power, education, culture and access to information.

Under socialism, as campaigns are waged to further transform the relations of production and the social relations, restricting bourgeois right becomes a crucial part of staying on the socialist road and advancing toward communism. This often involves narrowing wage differences and equalizing access to social resources of all kinds. Eventually, this process will lead to placing social needs at the highest priority. As Marx described this step (in *The Critique of the Gotha Program*), “In the higher phase of communist society, only then can the narrow horizons of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: ‘From each according to her ability, to each according to her needs!’”

Through the Cultural Revolution, the campaign to “restrict bourgeois right” also meant the struggle to curtail the accumulation of wealth, political power and privileged access to other resources by not only the old, traditional bourgeoisie, but also by the newly developing bourgeois forces inside the party who, due to their positions of authority, could offer such wealth and privileges to allies and supporters. The development of a new bourgeoisie in the party was a clear danger to the socialist project, and became the primary target of the struggle against revisionism, against those “persons in power taking the capitalist road.”

²¹⁷ The process of the *proletarianization* of all classes in society, which began with the capitalist challenge to feudalism, is completed only through the long period of socialist transformation. This period is marked by the changes in the relations of productions, great educational movements, reduction of the gap between city and countryside, of mental and manual labor, and of all social inequalities. Through this process, former peasantry, former intelligentsia and former capitalists and bureaucrats become both mental and manual workers: proletarians. The result is, as The Internationale proclaims, “The international working class shall be the human race.”

party. The last thing you want in a party—or in socialist society generally—is a membership of yes-men and women.

In the course of political struggle and socialist construction, the most advanced elements from the working class and other strata should be brought into the party and developed as leaders. The party must practice democratic centralism and the mass line in order to concentrate the most advanced understanding of the situation in society and the world, and develop a political line and policies that keep society on the socialist road and support the world revolution.

Mass organizations that are directly led by the party may take a wide variety of forms, such as the workers' soviets in the Russian Revolution and the revolutionary committees that were organized at the local and provincial level during the Cultural Revolution. One guiding principle is elective institutions which enable the people's voices to be heard and their interests to be represented. In general, the institutions of proletarian power are historically conditioned; they will evolve and take new forms as the political consciousness of the people changes along the socialist road.

At the same time, the masses must have the right to criticize and supervise the party and its policies. As we have seen, this was a core element of the Cultural Revolution. In addition, people must be able to organize themselves into mass organizations and opposing parties—as long as they do not openly oppose socialism or attempt to overthrow it.

It is better to allow the class struggle in socialist society to take place out in the open, where the party and the masses can debate the political line, direction, priorities and policies of the whole society--and struggle with those who have differences with the communist party. This is part of fostering a critical spirit in socialist society, which will strengthen proletarian rule, not weaken it. Working people, intellectuals and other non-proletarian class strata must be encouraged to play an active role in this process without fear of retaliation. People generally must have ease of mind in socialist society. As Mao put it, "We must not make things such that everybody feels as if he has a thorn in his side."²¹⁸

In China, there were a number of democratic parties that supported the 1949 Revolution, and they continued to function in a limited way alongside the CCP during the new democratic stage of the revolution. In 1957, Mao explained the policy of the CCP towards these parties:

It is the desire as well as the policy of the Communist Party to exist side by side with the democratic parties for a long time to come. But whether the democratic parties can long remain in existence depends not merely on the desire of the Communist Party but on how well they acquit themselves and on whether they enjoy the support of the people. Mutual supervision among the various parties is also a long-established fact, in the sense they have long been advising and criticizing each other. Mutual supervision is obviously not a one-sided matter; it means that the Communist Party can exercise supervision over the democratic

²¹⁸ "Conversation with High-Level Cadres and Leaders of Democratic Parties," Autumn 1956, Leung and Kau, p. 142.

parties, and vice-versa. Why should the democratic parties be allowed to exercise supervision over the Communist Party? Because a party as much as an individual has great need to hear opinions different from its own. We all know that supervision over the Communist Party is mainly exercised by the working people and the Party membership. But it augments the benefit to us to have supervision by the democratic parties too.²¹⁹

In our view, Mao's reasoning *may* be relevant to the socialist stage of the revolution. While each country will have its own freedom and necessity after the seizure of power, it may be beneficial to allow parties and organizations which do not oppose socialism, and have popular support, to function in socialist society.

The right to organize politically is especially important if more than one party and army play a leading role in the struggle to overthrow the old order. This will be a feature of the revolutionary struggles in many countries. This may often be the case in the imperialist countries where the period of armed struggle and the battle for state power are telescoped, making it more difficult for one party to establish political hegemony. This may also be true in societies which encompass several nations or people in various stages of national development, and who have developed separate revolutionary parties or organizations.

In all such societies, the victory of the struggle for state power will be contingent on the leadership abilities of the parties involved, including their ability to join and coordinate their efforts. And after the conquest of power—under new democracy, where applicable, or socialism—there needs to be a concerted effort to win these parties, or as much of them as possible, to join together and develop a cohesive line and a single leading Communist Party.

Conclusion

Given the uphill nature of the battle, the lack of historical experience, the development of an unfavorable objective situation in the early 1970s, and the substantial difficulties encountered by Mao and other revolutionaries in leading the Cultural Revolution, it was not possible to consolidate it and keep China on the socialist road. More important, what is remarkable about the Cultural Revolution is that it accomplished so much in a few short years.²²⁰

²¹⁹ “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People,” Section VIII. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5. See also “On the Ten Great Relationships,” (The section on the relationship between Party and non-Party), April 1956, in Schram, p. 75 and the preceding website.

²²⁰ This is the same attitude that Marx, Engels and Lenin took to the Paris Commune of 1871, the world's first proletarian revolution. Even though it was crushed by the French bourgeoisie with the backing of the German army after only two months, Marx wrote that it was correct for the Communards to “storm the heavens”; Lenin observed that the success of the October Revolution was due in part to correctly summing up the strengths and weaknesses of the Commune's policies.

We should ask what the world would be like without the experience of 1966 to 1976 in China. We would not have the experience of a *revolutionary* socialist society, of millions of people awakening to political struggle and the achievement of many “socialist new things.” Today’s revolutionaries around the world would not have the necessary tools to explain the reversals of socialism, first in the Soviet Union, and then in China. Without the divergent roads of revisionism and revolution having been clearly marked, the difficulties of charting the course forward from here would be daunting, and the pull toward discarding the socialist project would be massive.

Instead, the Cultural Revolution has passed down a precious legacy of theoretical understanding and revolutionary practice for future generations. Future socialist societies will reach for a higher level of revolutionary consciousness and efforts by the working class to exercise more direct control over all of society.

Just as successful revolutions never repeat themselves, future cultural revolutions in socialist societies, even in China itself, will not simply replicate the Chinese experience from 1966-1976.²²¹ In the future, informed by the historic lessons of the GPCR, genuine communists will be more aware of this threat and will exert every effort to mobilize the masses to expose and remove bourgeois elements in the party *before* they become strong enough to challenge proletarian rule.

As a result of the Cultural Revolution, we know that in every socialist society there will be intense class struggle, and there will be repeated tests of strength between those who seek to stay on the socialist road and revisionists who advocate policies that will restore capitalism sooner or later. The forms that these periodic tests of strength will take will be varied and complex, but they will undoubtedly include mass upheavals such as the Cultural Revolution.

In addition, fundamental principles of the Cultural Revolution remain relevant in today’s revolutionary movements, such as continuously revolutionizing the party, encouraging the masses to criticize mistakes made by party members and leaders, and the importance of society-wide struggle over culture and ideas, including the study of revolutionary theory to guide practice. Finally, the polemics of the Chinese Communist Party against the Soviet revisionists before and during the Cultural Revolution, especially refuting the notion of a peaceful transition to socialism, hold critical lessons for revolutionaries today.

Serious revolutionary parties and groups battling against imperialism and reactionary regimes around the world today are studying and debating these questions. It is a real advance for the oppressed worldwide that Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, including the legacy of the Cultural Revolution, has been upheld, developed and creatively applied today by Maoist parties and organizations in India, the Philippines, Turkey, Nepal, Greece, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Brazil and other countries.

²²¹ For a detailed and uplifting report on the resurgence of workers’ and peasants’ struggles in China today, see Robert Weil’s article, “A New Revolution? Chinese Working Classes Confront the Globalized Economy.” <http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/?q=node/view/371>

The struggle for proletarian revolution, socialism and communism cannot inspire billions of people without answering difficult questions about the reversals suffered by the first wave of socialist revolutions, and what will be done differently in the future. One of the bourgeoisie's most potent ideological weapons against revolutionary movements is the ubiquitous and suffocating claim that socialism is a "failed system." This must be answered with a serious analysis of the roots and process of capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union and China, and how the masses of people in socialist countries can use the lessons of the Cultural Revolution to stay on the socialist road. With a deeper understanding of the positive and negative lessons of socialist revolutions in the 20th century, communist ideology will emerge as a stronger and more vibrant force in the 21st century.

--MLM Revolutionary Study Group

The MLM Revolutionary Study Group is not affiliated with any revolutionary party in the U.S. We advocate the development of a broad and dynamic anti-imperialist struggle that is closely connected to the most exploited and oppressed sections of people in the U.S. Additionally, we anticipate that serious revolutionaries who share an internationalist perspective and mass orientation will undertake the building of revolutionary organization to concentrate and develop leadership for such efforts, and to chart the pathways for revolution in the U.S., with a significant section of the working class and oppressed nationalities in the lead.

We encourage such a project and will work to assist its development in every way we can, which includes drawing on the rich lessons of struggle of the 1960s and 70s and on the experience of revolutionary forces in the world today, especially revolutionary Maoist parties and organizations. To reach us, please write to mlm.rsg@gmail.com.

Our attitude toward ourselves should be "to be insatiable in learning" and towards others "to be tireless in teaching." - Mao Zedong

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