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SOCIALIST MAN

and the CHINESE REVOLUTION

The Basis of the Cultural Revolution

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What i would like to talk about is not so much Mao's thought and the cultural revolution specifically - for i am a real expert on neither - but rather the historical basis of the need for the cultural revolution. Mao's thought will, i suspect, intrude from time to time.

It is not exactly new to say that experience determines consciousness. Throughout virtually the entire history of the species, man has known only one fact -- brute poverty for almost all members of society. The memory of this historic human experience weighs heavily on the minds of today's men -- including those who are no longer so directly and personally touched by poverty. Even the latter - some members of the so-called affluent societies - have both internal and worldwide poverty to remind them how precarious is their hold on physical comfort, and how recent a phenomenon is their affluence from an historical viewpoint. And the security offered by affluence is vitiated by the ever-present danger that the poor of their own society and of the world will come and take it all away.

There are two kinds of security (or insecurity). There is physical security, which depends simply on knowing that one need not worry about food, clothing and shelter. And there is psychic security, which involves nothing less than a person's sense of his or her own value, worth and power as a human being. Throughout mankind's history, psychic and material security have been identical: desperate poverty has enslaved men by tying them to the most elementary kind of drudgery, and has severely limited their external and internal horizons, preventing men from realizing any but the very smallest part of their human potential.

This dual insecurity, material and psychic, has been potentially separable into the two component parts only recently, and for only a relatively few people. This, of course, is because technological developments under capitalism have created the conditions in which men could be freed from drudgery and, indeed, from virtually all unpleasant work. But men continue to see psychic security in terms of material objects, rather than realizing that genuine psychic security can be found only in the establishment of institutions which will allow human development and human relationships to be the important values in life. This continuing linkage of psychic and material security leads, in an affluent society, to a set of values and relationships among men which i call materialistic -- the high valuing of material things and the treating of other people as objects, both economically and emotionally. It is in this sense that i use the term 'materialism' and 'materialistic' in this paper.

I don't for a minute deny the historic socialist dictum that ownership by the workers of the means of production is an absolute imperative for the development of a socialist society based on humane values. It obviously is. But this is not enough: socialism is not automatic upon dispossession of the capitalists. A struggle remains for the development of socialist conscious-

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ness, rather than a materialistic outlook. This struggle includes, most importantly, the questions of, first, active participation by the masses in the control of economic (and other) institutions and decision-making, and, second, the kinds of values which people learn from their experience and from the society's education, propaganda, and cultural institutions. These are the issues which are central to the Cultural Revolution in China.

Here, in the light of Professor Schurmann's thought-provoking remarks earlier (i.e. earlier in the conference at which this paper was given), I would like to break into my paper to say that these two aspects of the struggle for the development of socialist consciousness correspond to what Prof. Schurmann has correctly identified as the two sides of the dialectical relationship between spontaneity and consciousness in the revolutionary process. To his statement that the arousal of the masses must precede the identification (and, presumably, the leadership) of the leaders and the conscious process of education, I would add that this dialectical process must proceed constantly -- the masses must be constantly aroused, time after time, to struggle

I can do no more than to bring up this tremendously important question of the respective weight given to spontaneous action and conscious leadership at various times in the revolutionary process. Obviously there are no strict rules. And it is true that Mao and those 'on his side' in the process have exercised leadership frequently since Fall 1966 -- first simply in encouraging and aiding the Cultural Revolutionists against those in the Party and State bureaucracy who either opposed the Cultural Revolution or did not realize the depth to which it must go; later, by counselling moderation, that is by pointing out the need to take into account such factors as the need for production and the fact that on the whole most Party and State people were doing 'basically good work'. At a time of generally low political consciousness, the quality of leadership becomes extremely important -- leadership must be both bold and strong (as in helping the Cultural Revolution to launch itself), and be very sensitive to the need for spontaneity on the part of the masses (and, consequently, to the need for leadership self-effacement) (as during much of the Cultural Revolution to date). Mao's combination of these qualities, his knowledge of the Chinese people, and his steadfast adherence to socialist principles, make him a brilliant socialist leader.

The natural -- that is, logical, -- tendency toward materialism (that is, finding psychic value in material objects) creates one of history's most fundamental contradictions. On the one hand, there is in man an innate drive for an integrated understanding of his environment and for human relationships and individual development which are satisfying and integrative. On the other hand, there is the historically-determined tendency toward materialism -- the tendency for man's experience to lead him to seek psychic security in material objects. What this contradiction means is that a socialist society, based on humane values, will not come about 'naturally' or automatically, even following the triumph of the workers' revolution. Instead it will come, if at all, only as a result of a very long, difficult, and painstaking process of education and the development of political consciousness, following the winning of the battle for control of basic economic (and other) institutions. The Cultural Revolution is the highest expression thusfar in China of this educational process.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PARTY

Because of the importance of the individual leader, especially where economic and state power have been taken, the Chinese have insisted that members of the Communist Party must be extremely careful in their conduct. Mao emphasizes this, and Lin Piao repeats the dictum in his 'Long Live the Victory of People's War!' And though it may not be fashionable to quote him now, Liu Shao-chi makes this an important element of 'How to be a Good Communist'.

This is why the Cultural Revolution is aimed especially at the Party and at members of the Party who are not sufficiently vigilant in encouraging active participation in the revolution by the masses of peasants and workers, and in guarding against the development of materialistic thinking. This, as I understand it, is the important charge against the very high CP leaders, including Liu Shao-chi, who have been attacked. As Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman point out in their excellent editorial on the Cultural Revolution (Monthly Review, January 1967), no developing nation as poor as China can avoid the existence of elites, and of disparities of income and privileges. The important question is how to assure that these elites do not become a social class who have class interests which are in antagonistic, or fundamental, contradiction to the interests of the masses. Two aspects of this potential elitism bear discussion: How does it occur?, and, How can it be prevented, or at least sufficiently ameliorated as not to prevent the development of a socialist society?

Actually, what could be more 'natural' than the development among men and women who were the central core of the revolution, of a feeling of superiority, however slight -- a tendency to want to take it a bit easy after twenty-five brutal, dangerous years of revolutionary struggle -- a feeling that once state power was won at least a slight relaxation could be afforded? The Chinese Communist Party does not consist of supermen, after all, but rather of people who have been formed and remain deeply imprinted by their past in a corrupt, semi-feudal, semi-capitalist society (cf. William Hinton's Fanshen, published by Monthly Review Press). Remember that the path to socialism is a very long, very narrow one; every mistake has far-reaching consequences.

This all applies to the hard core of old-time CP members. What of the 90%+ of the present Party members who have joined

since 1953? How many of those have a strong streak of opportunism? How many have experiences much less marked by revolutionary struggle, and consequently are less fully developed ideologically? How many have strong legacies of 'incorrect thinking' from their past experiences? And further: Remember also that many people whose training and thinking can only be classified as bourgeois have had to be given important positions in the areas of education and the arts because of the dire lack of personnel both red and expert. Add to all this the fact that even men of good will and revolutionary experience (as well as those without) can in all sincerity judge wrongly factors which depend on subtle psychological perceptions and insights, and also can simply be wrong in their strategic balancing of various psychological, economic, social and political factors.

All this, when combined with the universal pre-existing 'natural' tendency toward materialism, adds up to a very dangerous situation, especially at the beginning of the transition period following the taking of economic and state power. My guess is that Mao only now feels that the economy is strong enough, and the potential for increased political consciousness sufficient, to warrant a direct attack on those who are not sufficiently aware of the need for the most active participation of the masses in the Revolution and who are consequently, objectively if not subjectively, leading the revolution toward capitalism (or what i call materialism).

I might note a particularly disconcerting and frustrating aspect of Chinese rhetoric -- the tendency to say that the objective results of a person's actions were in fact the subjectively desired results of those actions, a rhetorical approach which fails to recognize important aspects of motivation. But on the other hand, the Chinese are well-known for a deep and far-reaching belief that people who make mistakes, even grievous ones, are not guilty of deadly sins but can, through proper experience and consequent understanding, rectify their bad thinking and continue as valuable members of the revolution. It is important to note that the largest percentage of those attacked as 'counterrevolutionary' retain their Party membership and in any case are certainly not liquidated - that has never been Mao's way.

What have the Chinese done to at least ameliorate these tendencies toward elitism? Aside from making the ownership of the means of production public rather than private, which is of course absolutely fundamental, the most important single aspect of the Chinese road to socialism is the close relationship between the people and the Party, which arises from and in turn gives rise to a depth of participation by the masses which has few, if any rivals in the world. As long as the people/Party relationship is a close one, as long as the people are actively involved in the running of their own lives, rather than being coerced, or directed, or merely acquiescent -- then relationships among people of all kinds (economic, political, social) can develop which are built of mutual trust and recognition of commonality of interests. A people/Party relationship based on coercion, dictatorship, or acquiescence can only lead to the kind of manipulative and materialistic relationships which are so prevalent in bourgeois societies, and which the Soviet Union is so widely criticized for having developed.

That the relationship between people and Party in China is relatively good does not mean that it is perfect; far from it. Fanshen catalogues some incredible malfeasances by Communist Party members at a local level; and the newspapers of China are full of complaints by the people against members of the elite. One of the most important aspects of the Cultural Revolution is that the masses must be encouraged to take power and to struggle against the elite -- that is, they must throw out members of the elite they don't like and install leaders they do. Denigrators of the Chinese Revolution may take this as a sign of the Revolution's weakness and, indeed, degeneracy; i think it is better seen, in historical perspective, as a sign of the Revolution's fundamental strength.

Aside from trying to assure the Chinese Revolution's democraticness from below - which is another way of viewing the Cultural Revolution and the Red Guards - the Chinese are trying to, as it were, democratize from above also. That is, they are seeking to alter the actual experience of the elite so as to assure that they develop as few elitist qualities as possible -- always remembering that most of the elite's consciousness, and the most fundamental part, is determined by their experience of being in a privileged position.

A symbolic but not unimportant action to combat elitism was the recent deletion of all insignia of rank from the uniforms of the Red Army. Much more substantial, and effective, is the requirement that bureaucrats and 'higher-ups' in all areas spend a certain amount of time each year, usually a month (in factories, sometimes as much as a day a week), doing physical labor alongside the masses. The reason for this, and its power, is obvious: experience determines consciousness, and non-productive members of the elite should have experiences which will ameliorate their psychological and physical separation from the masses.

But it cannot be overemphasized that these 'democratization from above' measures are only holding actions. The primary thrust must come from below -- from the active participation (the Chinese say struggle) of the masses, and the subsequent creation of a level of confidence between people and leaders which allows the development of humane relationships. Without this happening, the Chinese Revolution is doomed.

What of Mao's thought? To the extent that the Cultural Revolution derives from and reflects Mao's ideology - and i think this is considerable - much of the above analysis is concerned with Mao's thought. As far as i know, Mao has not written a

comprehensive Maoist ideology. The reason for this is obvious: since 1923 he has been organizing, every day, and what he has written has been written in the context of that organizing, and flowing from it. This makes it difficult to identify a specifically maoist ideology, and in a certain sense much of Mao's writing is tactical.

Without assuming to identify a maoist ideology, i would like to close with a few comments about the very real contributions that Mao has made to socialist thought.

First, the Chinese Revolution itself, which owes no small debt to Mao, has over the past 45 years provided a wealth of experience and lessons - including many experiments and path-breaking experiences - which are of immense value to socialists and revolutionaries everywhere (including, i might say, North America). This contribution must be rated highly: what is more valuable than real experience, and the unifying of theory and practice?

Second, Mao has consistently insisted that 'politics be in command'. In the situation in China now, i take him to mean that once economic and state power are won, and economic development assured (and these two tasks have been done), political decisions about the development of socialist consciousness take precedence over economic decisions about the efficiency of production. This emphasis is of extraordinary importance.

More generally, 'politics in command' means that technical factors are less important than human factors. In war, morale and organization and political support in the countryside are more important than weapons (and in fact are a means of obtaining weapons). In economics, participation by the masses and good organization are more important than machinery -- as long as one's goal is building socialism and not just raising production. Mao has always strongly emphasized political organization and popular support as the fundamental factors in the revolution, on which all other factors are based.

Lastly, i would cite Mao's emphasis on the predominance, after the taking of power, of non-antagonistic contradictions, which are defined as conflicts of interest among people who are part of the Revolution -- workers, peasants, and all others adjudged not to be 'enemies of the people'. I think that this emphasis, and that on 'politics in command', are part of Mao's recognition of the extraordinary difficulty of the path to socialism and the development of socialist consciousness.

Non-antagonistic contradictions are not limited to the material sphere, though of course they exist there and are an important part of the problem of the potential development of materialistic thinking. As Marx and Engels wrote, these contradictions exist as well on the level of individual psychology -- that is, each individual in China carries within him or her many and deep-rooted vestiges of the former society. Within each person's mind is a socialist part and a capitalist (and, indeed, feudal) part, and the two are in contradiction. The task of socialist education is to enhance the development of the socialist part and root out the capitalist part. This has been the aim of the many education and rectification campaigns which have occurred in the Communist Party and in the country as a whole, and is the task of the Cultural Revolution.

By emphasizing the continuing existence of contradictions (albeit non-antagonistic), and having extended Marxist concepts of class war from the macro-institutional level to the individual psychological level, Mao and the Chinese have correctly identified, and act upon, the most fundamental questions involved in the development of a socialist society after the taking of state power. We should pay close attention to the extraordinarily important developments in China.

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We Americans learn from the beginning not to believe in democracy and in people -- that is, not to believe in the ability of men to control their lives and the institutions which shape them. We learn this from our experience -- from our relationship to institutions, from the way we are treated as children and throughout our lives. Thus, all of us, including us on the Left, don't really believe in the possibility that a revolution could transform men (Chinese, Cubans, Vietnamese), especially their leaders, in their relationships with each other and with social institutions. We are sure that these societies continue to be run in an elitist way, and only direct experience or an often uncritical identification with the country shakes this feeling. The degree to which this perverts our view of the world and limits our own revolutionary effectiveness, should be obvious: after all, we just really don't believe in people!

The basis for this is economic: we, and our fellow men, do not control fundamental institutions, especially the economic ones (which are still, after all, basic). All else flows from this: we are left controlling only things of peripheral importance, we turn to often intense personalism, we grow cynical about the possibility of democracy (which after all is never found in our lives), even while our rhetoric proclaims otherwise; ideologies emphasizing technology or social psychological factors attain great influence. This last is very important: we must remember that the decisive aspect of people's power, from which self-respect and personal fulfillment derive, lies in control of economic institutions, both of production and distribution. This is one of the most important lessons of the Chinese Revolution.

