

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN CHINA

A SOCIALIST ANALYSIS

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This article appeared in
the January 1967 issue of
Monthly Review, edited by
Leo Huberman (1903-1968)
and Paul Sweezy.

published by
New England Free Press
791 Tremont St.
Boston, Mass. 02118

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THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN CHINA

The extraordinary events of recent months in China have not unnaturally given rise to diverse interpretations, hopes, and fears. *Fortune* magazine, for example, headlines its cover story in the November issue, "Beset by failures, an aging Mao Tse-tung lashes out to save RED CHINA'S SINKING REVOLUTION." Both diagnosis and prognosis clearly reveal American capitalism's hopes and its increasingly insatiable appetite for new "responsibilities." After stressing, quite rightly in our opinion, the great historic importance of what is happening in China, the *Fortune* article proceeds:

If one clear meaning has emerged from the turmoil which since mid-summer has agitated that vast, withdrawn nation, holding almost a quarter of the entire human race, it is that the Mao Tse-tung version of Communist theory and practice has failed catastrophically, and China could now swing wildly in any one of several directions. It could in due course plunge into the convulsions of another era of prolonged civil strife. If history rules for this consequence, the odds are high that the Communist regime will go under, and Mao with it. China's immense difficulties would then become the object (as in humanity and logic they should) of the solicitude and competence of more favored nations.

Unhappily for *Fortune*—and the favored nations which are overflowing with solicitude and competence—all evidence points to the conclusion that this view of China's problems is pure wishful thinking. In the same month that the *Fortune* article appeared, *Scientific American* carried a report by a Japanese student of Chinese industrial development estimating that in terms of technology China is now no more than two decades behind Japan. As for the future:

China's present national income is estimated to be about \$100 per capita, or \$60 billion. . . . She has emerged from the "takeoff" stage . . . and entered the industrialization stage. If she follows the experience of Japan, she will soon accumulate enough

industrial knowledge and capital to make a breakthrough into a period of rapid economic growth. . . . In 10 to 15 years she might attain a per capita income equal to Japan's present figure (\$620). In that case China's gross national income would be about 70 percent as large as that of the U.S.

How far off is the impending breakthrough for China? My own estimate is five to 10 years. . . .

This hardly sounds like the catastrophic failure of *Fortune's* dreams. Nor has anything remotely resembling such a failure been discovered by the United States' growing fraternity of Pekingologists who, as is well known, are for the most part far from being enthusiasts for the Mao regime. They quarrel among themselves about how rapidly the Chinese economy expanded during the 1950's and how severe the setback of 1959-1961 was. But there is pretty general agreement that by relevant historical standards the growth of the 50's was very impressive and that the recovery and advance since 1961 have been steady.*

Finally, as one last indication of Chinese "failure," the reader may be reminded that just before the November issue of *Fortune* hit the stands, there came the news that China had tested a ballistic missile with a nuclear warhead—years sooner than most "authorities" had estimated.

It seems that solid economic success rather than failure has characterized China's development during the last five years and that the outlook for the period ahead is very favorable indeed. What then does explain the tumultuous events

* We make this statement not from extensive first-hand knowledge of the work of the Pekingologists but on the basis of a privately circulated 78-page paper entitled "The Economy of China: A Guided Tour Through Sixteen Studies," by John G. Gurley, professor of economics at Stanford and editor of the *American Economic Review*. Professor Gurley makes the important point that Chinese economic development has taken place without benefit of large amounts of foreign aid. Indeed, "up to the present, China has probably extended more foreign aid than she has received." And he notes a peculiar omission in the works of the experts: "While almost all of the studies of Communist China's economy have concentrated on machines, buildings, and food, her dramatically successful efforts to raise the health, education, and welfare standards of her people would also seem to be worthy of attention . . . this area, for some reason, has been almost totally neglected by our 'China experts.'"

of recent months which the Chinese have baptized the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution"?

Before attempting an answer to this question, we must disclaim any pretension to special knowledge, let alone inside information. We have collected and digested as much information as we could get hold of, and we have talked to people who have been in China in the recent past. But the areas of ignorance and uncertainty remain distressingly large. In what follows we have simply tried to fit available scraps of information into a coherent theoretical framework, but this framework must of course be regarded as tentative and subject to revision as and when further information becomes available.

One school of thought in the West sees the Cultural Revolution as essentially a reaction to China's international position—threatened by expanding American military aggression in Vietnam on the one hand and virtually abandoned by her one-time Soviet ally on the other. Variants of this view are put forward by such well informed and politically diverse observers as Franz Schurmann of the University of California and Isaac Deutscher, the well known historian and political biographer of Stalin and Trotsky.* For our part, we have no doubt that there is a large element of truth in this theory. China does live under the constant threat of American aggression, and there is every indication that this condition will continue indefinitely even if she is not dragged into a war against her will. Furthermore, in the light of Soviet policy toward China since the withdrawal of the technicians in 1960, and given the Chinese leadership's obvious unwillingness to accept the role of a Soviet satellite, it is no more than ordinary prudence for China to assume that in a showdown she cannot rely on Soviet support. Under these circumstances, much of

* See Schurmann, "What Is Happening in China?", *New York Review of Books*, October 20, 1966; and Deutscher, "Mao at Bay," *The Nation*, October 31, 1966. Deutscher expresses what may be called the external-pressure theory more emphatically and at greater length in an interview scheduled for publication in the newly founded Italian magazine *La Sinistra*. Neither Schurmann nor Deutscher would maintain that external pressure is the only force at work in China, but their almost exclusive emphasis on it clearly indicates that they consider it to be the decisive factor.

what has happened in recent months can be plausibly interpreted as China's way of preparing to go it alone and if necessary to fight a protracted war against the United States. The heroic spirit of Yen-an is being recreated; the army is being reorganized on a more decentralized basis and all outward insignia of rank have been abolished; opponents of Mao Tse-tung's strategy—among whom, according to Schurmann, are both anti-“revisionist” hardliners who favor some sort of preventive action against the United States aggressors in Vietnam and “professionals” who want a reconciliation with the Soviet Union—are being dismissed; and the whole country is being unified under the charismatic leadership of Chairman Mao.

All this is no doubt true, and yet there are aspects of the Cultural Revolution which are difficult to reconcile with the external-pressure theory. If the main objective were to prepare the country for a long war, one would expect that ideological and propaganda themes would de-emphasize internal conflicts and glorify all that is best in China's history and traditions. This was in fact what happened during the war of resistance against Japan, and it is also what happened in the Soviet Union during the Second World War. But it is not what is happening in China now. On the contrary, one of the central themes of the Cultural Revolution is a sweeping attack on old customs and habits. Stuart Schram told the International Teach-in on China at the University of Toronto on October 15th that in some respects recent developments in China “mark a sharp break with previous policies, and with some of the most fundamental characteristics of Mao's thought and action for half a century. This is most obviously the case as regards the wholly negative attitude toward tradition.”* And it is equally obvious that the whole Red Guard movement has exacerbated rather than ameliorated internal conflicts. Pretty clearly, the Chinese leadership, while it is no doubt preparing to fight a

* We quote from a Xeroxed copy of Schram's address distributed to the press at the Teach-in. Schram is the author of *Mao Tse-tung*, a biography of the Chinese leader which has just been published by Penguin.

war if necessary, is also pursuing domestic goals which it considers to be at least equally important.

This impression is strengthened and confirmed by a reading of what may be called the official manifesto of the Cultural Revolution, the "Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," adopted on August 8, 1966, and published in *Peking Review* of August 12th (in China the Decision is popularly known as the "Sixteen Points" from the numbered sections into which it is divided). There is not a single word in this document relating to the international situation, not even a denunciation of American aggression in Vietnam. And both its tone and its spirit reflect what appears to be a deep and at the same time confidently optimistic preoccupation with purely domestic Chinese affairs. We believe therefore that it is not only justified but essential to attempt to understand the Cultural Revolution not simply as a reaction to international pressures but as a phase of the internal development of Chinese socialism.

Perhaps the best starting place is the Central Committee's Decision of August 8th to which we have just referred. The first and second sections are entitled "A New Stage in the Socialist Revolution" and "The Main Current and the Zig-zags"; they give the reasons for the Cultural Revolution, its objective, the chief actors, and the obstacles to its success. Here are the key passages:

Although the bourgeoisie has been overthrown, it is still trying to use the old ideas, culture, customs and habits of the exploiting classes to corrupt the masses, capture their minds and endeavor to stage a come-back. . . . At present, our objective is to struggle against and crush those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road, to criticize and repudiate the reactionary bourgeois academic "authorities" and the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes and to transform education, literature and art and all other parts of the superstructure that do not correspond to the socialist base, so as to facilitate the consolidation and development of the socialist system. . . . Large numbers of revolutionary young people, previously unknown, have become courageous and daring pathbreakers. They are vigorous in action and intelligent. Through the media of big-character posters and great debates, they argue things out, expose and criticize thorough-

ly, and launch resolute attacks on the open and hidden representatives of the bourgeoisie. . . . This is the main current in the great proletarian cultural revolution. . . . Since the cultural revolution is a revolution, it inevitably meets with resistance. This resistance comes chiefly from those in authority who have wormed their way into the Party and are taking the capitalist road. It also comes from the old force of habit in society. . . .

Later, in the fifth section, the purpose of the Cultural Revolution is stated even more succinctly: "The main target of the present movement is those within the Party who are in authority and are taking the capitalist road." Evidently much depends on what is meant by "taking the capitalist road." But before we turn to this subject, let us summarize briefly the rest of the Decision.

Section 3: "Put Daring Above Everything Else and Boldly Arouse the Masses." This section begins with the statement that the "outcome of this great cultural revolution will be determined by whether the Party leadership does or does not dare boldly to arouse the masses," and ends as follows:

What the Central Committee of the Party demands of the Party committees at all levels is that they persevere in giving correct leadership, put daring above everything else, boldly arouse the masses, change the state of weakness and incompetence where it exists, encourage those comrades who have made mistakes but are willing to correct them to cast off their mental burdens and join in the struggle, and dismiss from their leading posts those in authority who are taking the capitalist road and so make possible the recapture of the leadership for the proletarian revolutionaries.

Section 4: "Let the Masses Educate Themselves in the Movement." This is a stern injunction against any kind of paternalism. Having been aroused, the masses must be given their head, even at the cost of mistakes and disorder. The masses must "liberate themselves and any method of doing things on their behalf must not be used."

Section 5: "Firmly Apply the Class Line of the Party." The Left should be developed and strengthened, and the "ultra-reactionary bourgeois Rightists and counter-revolutionary revisionists" should be isolated and defeated. It is in this section that the sentence quoted above occurs about the main target

being those who are in the Party, in authority, and taking the capitalist road. But a warning is immediately added against confusing Rightists with people who have done something wrong. In relation to the academic reform now under way, the concluding sentence of the section is significant: "Care should be taken to distinguish strictly between the reactionary scholar despots and 'authorities' on the one hand and people who have the ordinary bourgeois academic ideas on the other."

Section 6: "Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People." This reaffirms a long-standing principle of Chinese communism and the one which most sharply distinguishes Maoism from Stalinism: contradictions among the people are normal and must not be made into contradictions "between ourselves and the enemy." Further:

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.

When there is a debate, it should be conducted by reasoning, not by coercion or force.

Section 7: "Be on Guard Against Those Who Brand the Revolutionary Masses as 'Counter-Revolutionaries.'" This is a warning against what is apparently considered to be a widespread tactic of the Rightists. But it also contains an admonition against arbitrary counter-measures. Crimes should be dealt with according to the law, and "even proven Rightists should be dealt with on the merits of each case at a later stage of the movement."

Section 8: "The Question of Cadres." This divides cadres into four categories and states again that Rightists are the target. "At the same time," it adds, "they should be given a way out so that they can turn over a new leaf."

Section 9: "Cultural Revolutionary Groups, Committees and Congresses." According to a friend in China whose judgment we respect, this is an extremely important section. It therefore seems worthwhile to quote at considerable length:

Many new things have begun to emerge in the great proletarian cultural revolution. The cultural revolution groups, committees and other organizational forms created by the masses in many schools and units are something new and of great historic importance.

These cultural revolutionary groups, committees and congresses are excellent new forms of organization whereby under the leadership of the Communist Party the masses are educating themselves. They are an excellent bridge to keep our Party in close contact with the masses. They are organs of power of the proletarian cultural revolution.

The struggle of the proletariat against the old ideas, culture, customs and habits left over from all the exploiting classes over thousands of years will necessarily take a very, very long time. Therefore, the cultural revolutionary groups, committees and congresses should not be temporary organizations but permanent standing mass organizations. They are suitable not only for colleges, schools and government and other organizations, but generally for factories, mines, other enterprises, urban districts and villages.

The section then goes on to specify that a system of general elections "like that of the Paris Commune" must be instituted to choose the members of these groups. Candidates are to be nominated after thorough discussion by the masses who retain the right of criticism and the power of recall.

Section 10: "Educational Reform." This states the need for thorough reform in accordance with the policy "of education serving proletarian politics and education being combined with productive labor, so as to enable those receiving an education to develop morally, intellectually and physically and to become laborers with socialist consciousness and culture." As to curriculum: "The period of schooling should be shortened. Courses should be fewer and better. The teaching material should be thoroughly transformed, in some cases beginning with simplifying complicated material."

Section 11: "The Question of Criticizing By Name in the Press." Except when specifically approved by the appropriate Party committee, criticism in the press is to be kept at a general level and not aimed at particular individuals.

Section 12: "Policy Towards Scientists, Technicians and Ordinary Members of Working Staffs." These people, "as long

as they are patriotic, work energetically, are not against the Party and socialism, and maintain no illicit relations with any foreign country," should be treated well and helped to "gradually transform their world outlook and style of work."

Section 13: "The Question of Arrangements For Integration With the Socialist Education Movement in City and Countryside." This section reminds us that the Cultural Revolution is being, as it were, superimposed on another movement, the "Socialist Education Movement," which was launched several years ago. The intent of the section seems to be to preserve arrangements already in operation where they are working well and elsewhere to permit the new forms being created by the Cultural Revolution to take over.

Section 14: "Take Firm Hold of the Revolution and Stimulate Production." The Cultural Revolution should stimulate, not hamper, production: "Any idea of counterposing the great Cultural Revolution against the development of production is incorrect."

Section 15: "The Armed Forces." This names the Military Commission of the Central Committee and the General Political Department of the People's Liberation Army as responsible for the Cultural Revolution in the armed forces.

Section 16: "Mao Tse-tung's Thought Is the Guide for Action in the Great Proletarian Revolution." This section is adequately summed up in its title. It contains a listing of six specially recommended works of Mao, which would make a good starting point for anyone wishing to familiarize himself with Mao's ideas.*

This summary hardly does justice to the August 8th Decision of the Central Committee, but it should be enough, we believe, to demonstrate that we are dealing with what is on its face a rational, radical, and humane document with which it is hard to see how any genuine revolutionary can find serious

* They are: *On New Democracy, Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art, On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People, Speech at the Chinese Communist Party's National Conference on Propaganda Work, Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership, and Methods of Work of Party Committees.* It is interesting to note that none of these deals with war or preparation for war.

fault. But the question of course is whether it is right to take it at face value and to interpret the Cultural Revolution accordingly.

Bourgeois commentators naturally do not think it necessary to ask, let alone answer, any question of this sort. For them Communist pronouncements are always couched in "Aesopian language" which has to be translated to discover its true meaning; and in case a struggle is at issue their wisdom rarely goes beyond familiar generalities about "purges" and "power struggles." Since most struggles are over power, and since those who lose out are almost by definition purged, "explanations" of this kind do not get us very far. Marxists must do better: if there is a power struggle, they have to try to determine what is its social basis and what policies or programs the contending groups seek to promote. Armed with this knowledge, they can make meaningful judgments about the importance of the struggle and the implications of its outcome.*

As we have indicated above, in interpreting the Cultural Revolution in China a great deal depends on what is meant by "taking the capitalist road," since those who are doing so are specifically identified as the main targets of the movement. Who are they, and what do they want?

It is not easy to give a satisfactory answer to this question because the only real capitalists in China today are the ones still drawing interest on what they were paid for their plants a decade and a half ago. It seems that these capitalists have

* Unfortunately, all too many people who consider themselves Marxists are either unable or unwilling to undertake serious analyses of this kind. In the case of the Cultural Revolution in China, for example, the press of the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe is no more enlightening than the American press. The Moscow-oriented Communist Parties see in the Cultural Revolution nothing but a deplorable deviation from their own correct line, presumably caused by personal failings on the part of Mao and his associates in the leadership of the Chinese Party. As a theoretical effort, this is far below the level of the external-pressure theory commented on earlier in this article. Lest we be misunderstood, we add that in many matters—though, as will appear, not in relation to the Cultural Revolution—the Chinese Party displays the same weakness. For example, if it has made a serious Marxist analysis of the Indonesian disaster, we have yet to hear about it; and, in respect to its differences with the Soviet Union, its press is distinguished less for the clarity of analysis than for bitterness of invective.

indeed been criticized and in some cases even manhandled by the Red Guards, but this is a mere by-product of the Cultural Revolution and certainly not central to its purpose. Those singled out by the Central Committee's Decision as the real targets, it will be remembered, are *in the Party and in authority*. In other words, they are powerful *Communists*. In what sense can they be said to be taking the capitalist road?

The key here is surely to be found in the great debate which has been shaking the Communist world during the last five years. One of the main themes on the Chinese side has been precisely that the European socialist countries have taken the capitalist road. Yugoslavia, the Chinese contend, has gone the farthest and has already restored capitalism. But the others, including the Soviet Union, are traveling in the same direction and unless appropriate counter-measures are taken in good time will sooner or later arrive at the same destination.

The Chinese have developed this argument most fully in relation to Yugoslavia, and, as MR readers know, we believe that it is marred by serious factual and theoretical weaknesses.* Nevertheless, there can be no doubt whatever that they are grappling with a very real and enormously important historical phenomenon: the growth in the socialist countries of an increasingly privileged and powerful social stratum in command of society's politico-economic apparatus. Along with this growth, and intricately interrelated with it, certain trends in the spiritual and moral sphere have developed. The revolutionary spirit of solidarity and sacrifice has declined; life has become "privatized," especially among the youth who tend increasingly to concentrate on their careers and to neglect social responsibilities; admiration for the material achievements and the supposedly freer ways of the more affluent capitalist societies has grown; an abyss has opened up between the style of life and the modes of thought of the leading stratum on the one hand and the still poor toiling masses on the other. The Chinese believe that these trends, if unchecked, must sooner or later culminate in the "restoration of capitalism." If we understand

* See our Review of the Month, "Peaceful Transition from Socialism to Capitalism?", in the issue of March, 1964.

them correctly, they do not mean by this that the state will one fine day sell the factories and farms to a new class of wealthy capitalists but rather that those in command of the factories and farms will go on strengthening their positions and gradually transform them into transferrable and inheritable property rights. From our present point of view it is perhaps not very important whether a society in which this occurred should or should not be called "capitalist"; it would in any case be a class society miles removed from the traditional goal and vision of revolutionary Marxism.

We have now to pose two questions which, as we shall attempt to show, are decisive for the interpretation of the Cultural Revolution. First, are the trends just alluded to operating in China as well as in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe? And second, who has an interest in opposing them and by what means can they be checked and reversed?

We have no hesitation in answering the first question with an unqualified affirmative. The growth of a privileged stratum in command of society's politico-economic apparatus is inevitable in any country in a period of rapid economic development from a condition of technological backwardness and low labor productivity. At the time of the victory of the Revolution China's per capita income was less than \$50 a year, and it is still not much more than double that figure. It is literally impossible for scientists, technicians, managers, and bureaucrats to perform their functions effectively on that kind of an income (the perquisites of office like provision of dwelling space, access to car pools, etc., must of course be included in real income). Society has to put at their disposal what they need to do their jobs. Here is the root cause of inequality and privilege in any country which has not reached a high degree of economic development. And for a long time as the economy grows, so also do the ranks of the privileged. Finally, privilege creates vested interests which the privileged will fight to maintain and expand, and it breeds and nourishes all the negative tendencies described above: selfishness, individualism, separation from the life of the masses, and so on. We may be quite certain that all these forces and tendencies have been and still are at work in China as well as in the other socialist countries.

When it comes to the question of opposition to these forces and tendencies, matters are not so clear. A Marxist theory dealing with the question can hardly be said to exist, perhaps because the existing socialist societies (including China) have all had ideological needs which conflict with a full and honest analysis of their own structure and dynamics. Be that as it may, this is an area which has yet to be scientifically explored, and hence what we have to say must be regarded as more in the nature of hypotheses than conclusions.

If our analysis to this point is correct, it makes no sense to talk about completely *preventing* the growth of a privileged stratum which has the potential to become a new ruling class: that is part of the necessary price of economic development. But it does make sense to talk about limiting the power of this stratum, keeping its privileges to the necessary minimum, and preventing it from solidifying its position and transforming its vested interests into inheritable property rights. Who has an interest in thus containing and controlling the privileged stratum? In one sense, the answer obviously is that all the non-privileged have such an interest. And yet this does not get us very far for the simple reason that large segments of the unprivileged still live under the influence of old moral and religious ideas which sanction and sanctify the privileges of the few and confer legitimacy on their rule. What we need to know is who has a *conscious* interest in containing and controlling the privileged and hence in actively fighting against their developing into a ruling class. First and foremost are those, both in the leadership and in the rank and file, who made the revolution and remain uncorrupted by the temptations of actual or potential privilege. It is up to them to lead the struggle and to enlist as much support as possible from the ranks of the unprivileged and the uncorrupted. If those who made the revolution fail in this task, or if they do not understand its necessity and hence do not try to carry it through—perhaps on the comforting theory that progress toward socialism and communism is automatically guaranteed—then they will have put their country firmly on what the Chinese call the capitalist road, and their successors who never had their revolutionary experience

and understanding will almost certainly not be able, and in all probability will not want, to divert it from that road.

Since the Soviet Union was the first socialist country, its history should clearly provide the most complete test to date of this theoretical schema. And we believe it does. The key to an understanding of Soviet experience is to be found in two circumstances. On the one hand, even at its peak, the Bolshevik Party did not have deep roots in the peasantry and hence was largely isolated from a majority of the population. And secondly, the magnificent revolutionary working-class organization which seized power in October 1917 emerged from the next four years of foreign intervention and civil war in a terribly weakened condition, a large proportion of its leaders and cadres killed off and its rank and file exhausted and scattered to the four corners of the land. Those who made the revolution were too weak and too lacking in widespread popular support to contain and control the growth of the privileged stratum which began in earnest with the First Five Year Plan and the collectivization drive of the late 1920's.

It is true that during the Stalin period this stratum was unable to consolidate its position as an emerging ruling class. But this was only because of the terror which Stalin, through the instrumentality of the secret police, directed particularly against the "bureaucrats" in the Party and the state apparatus. Whether it would have been possible in the objective conditions of that period to counterbalance the privileged stratum by a democratic policy of building support for the regime among the people is a question we cannot attempt to answer here. Suffice it to say that by destroying all opposition within the Bolshevik Party, Stalin foreclosed that alternative. In the long run he failed and he had to fail, not because he permitted the growth of a privileged stratum—he could not have prevented that if he had wanted to—but for two quite different reasons: He failed to acquire a real organized mass base to counterbalance the privileged stratum. And he trained up no new generation of genuine revolutionaries to lead and carry on the struggle against the restoration of class rule. After his death, the discontinuation of the terror simply meant that the privileged stratum was released from constraints and was free to move

to the front and center of the national stage. It seems to be making the most of its opportunities.

Against this background, it seems to us that the Cultural Revolution in China takes on its true meaning. If the Chinese Communist Party had come to power in the 1920's, its history and experience might well have been similar to that of the Bolsheviks in the USSR. But by the time it did come to power more than two decades later, it had rebuilt many times over the revolutionary cadres destroyed in 1927, acquired an enormous peasant base in the countryside, and accumulated a fund of revolutionary experience of unexampled scope and richness. With economic development came the inevitable growth of the privileged stratum, but in China unlike in the USSR, those who made the revolution were strong enough and had a large and loyal enough mass base to control and contain the privileged ones not by means of terror but through a series of education and rectification campaigns which began soon after the seizure of power and have been continuing ever since. In our view the Cultural Revolution should be seen as the latest and biggest and most ambitious of these campaigns.

On this interpretation the August 8th Decision of the Central Committee not only can but must be taken seriously as a statement of the real purpose and intent of the Cultural Revolution. The target is quite clearly not the privileged stratum as such: Mao and his colleagues are realists enough to know that it will be a long, long time before China can hope to wipe out substantial inequalities. The target is the privileged ones who are misusing their power to promote special and private interests: they are the ones who are taking the capitalist road. The method of dealing with them is not terror—the Decision contains repeated warnings against the use of force or coercion—but the mobilization of the unprivileged and particularly the youth who have not yet been exposed to the temptations of privilege and power. The Party leadership evidently believes that if the privileged stratum can be contained and controlled and the young can be won for the Revolution and its goals, then the country can be kept from taking the capitalist road for at least one more generation while economic development brings closer the day when general abundance will

make possible the real elimination of inequality and privilege.

There is no guarantee that the Cultural Revolution will attain its objective. The difficulty of preventing a reversion to class rule in an underdeveloped socialist society is much greater than most Marxists have yet recognized. It is not only that the growth of a privileged stratum is unavoidable but also that old ideas and habits of thought, old social attitudes, ingrained moral and religious values are enormously persistent and difficult to eradicate; and their very existence creates a soil which is ever receptive to the seeds of privilege and exploitation. At this stage we can only say that the Chinese have seen more clearly than anyone else both sides of this vast and complicated problem and are making the only kind of efforts to solve it which seem to have any chance of success. One thing is certain: terror will not solve it. What the Chinese are now calling "extensive democracy" may.

It is in this connection that the attempt to institutionalize the Cultural Revolution on the lines of the Paris Commune takes on special significance (the reader should go back and read the summary of Section 9 of the Decision on page 8 above, or better still read the original document). It seems clear that the committees and congresses of the Cultural Revolution have the potential to become organs of popular pressure and control like the original Soviets of 1905 and 1917. On the other hand, it would be foolish to deny that they might fall under the sway of the privileged stratum and its ideological servitors, in which case they would become mere window-dressing, as happened in the Soviet Union at a later time. If this should happen, the question would be whether there would still be around a leadership with the understanding and courage once again to arouse the masses and launch yet another Cultural Revolution.

It should be unnecessary, but unfortunately it is not, to say that an attempt at a dispassionate analysis of events in China is not some sort of blanket approval of everything that happens there. We believe in both analysis and criticism; in fact, as Marx so brilliantly showed, the two are inextricably intertwined. The Cultural Revolution has had and seems likely to continue to have ugly features. Excesses have been committed

against many individuals; for all the stress on the necessity of "great debates," those under attack seem to have had very little opportunity to defend themselves; the cult of "Mao's thought" seems to us to have been carried to ridiculous and in the long run harmful extremes;* the rejection of the old in favor of the new has, at least on some occasions, amounted to a completely un-Marxist form of cultural nihilism. These, and more, are the negative side of the Cultural Revolution. But it must be remembered that there are no positives without negatives, and there can be little doubt that negatives of this kind are inevitable when the masses are stirred into action and allowed to take the solution of problems into their own hands. Just imagine what would happen in the United States if a President were to invite the poor in this country, with special emphasis on the blacks in the urban ghettos, to win the war on poverty for themselves, promising them the protection of the army against reprisals! Can anyone doubt that the Chinese Cultural Revolution would look like a tea party by comparison? And yet it may well be that in the long run that is the only way a war on poverty can be won—not, needless to say, under a bourgeois president. The inevitability of negatives does not mean that it is not necessary and important to subject them to severe criticism. Without such criticism, how are the masses going to educate themselves, as the Chinese quite rightly say they should, and find out what are the right and what the wrong ways of doing things?

(December 8, 1966)

* It is necessary, however, not to fall into an opposite extreme by comparing the Red Guards' adulation of Mao with phenomena like the Nazis' fanatical attachment to Hitler. Mao's thought is after all rational and humane, in the great tradition of revolutionary Marxism. It is good that young people in China—and everywhere else—should study his works. What is not good is that they should deify him and count on him to do all their thinking for them. The fact that Mao's ideas contain numerous injunctions to revolutionaries to think for themselves is not a sufficient safeguard against this danger.

