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Den Vestige Maoismens sammenbrudd og krisa i AKP (ML)

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5.1 Mass Appeal - Important "first level" questions: The mass appeal is gone.

The most significant factor that contributed to the broad appeal of Maoism, its "Messianism" - its Utopian message - has been lost. That is, the belief that there are ideal societies on earth today, in China and other countries, where all the important social and human problems troubling people in the West have been solved.

There was a notion that there were "perfect socialist countries" In the extreme this included China (especially from the time of the Cultural Revolution), Albania, Vietnam, the Soviet Union before 1956, and several other countries which China, for diplomatic purposes, labelled socialist (Korea, Romania) - these were the ideal societies. Pointing to these societies was the answer in the West to the question, "What is the alternative?"

The dream of an "ideal socialist society", especially in the third world, was strong in the student and youth movement far beyond the ranks of the organized Maoists. The idea historically is inherited from, among other things, the Comintern period of reverence for the Soviet Union. But even more important is the fact that the idea fitted with strong ideological, emotional needs. "Out of here, that is my aim." (Quotation from Kafka, and slogan of an SFU student organization in Oslo.) An ideal society on earth, now. The extremely popular Swedish "History Book" ended with an enumeration of "ideal states": China, Albania, Vietnam, Cuba, Guinea Bissau. This enumeration of states which already by that time had little in common, was, in fact, absurd, but it was swallowed without protest by the hundreds of thousands of Nordic readers of the History Book. SF/SU felt in the same way a strong ideological need for "ideal states", which brought the party leadership to begin trying to elevate Cuba, Vietnam and Korea to this status (to be followed by episodes that they would prefer to forget today).

The distant perfect state is a tempting ideological weapon for movements in need of alternatives. Look at the nationalistic "Rasta" movement in Jamaica and its reverence for the Ethiopia of Haile Selassie. Or look at the Western capitalists' litanies (pilgrimage) to the dream picture of Japan! To an old "saved" China and Albania pilgrim like myself, mind you, this worship of Japan by the class enemy has some familiar and disturbing features.

In any case, for Western Maoists the collapse of this ideological system was violent. The image of a harmonious sisterhood of ideal societies changed to a picture of enemy states in bitter conflict, all of them with severe internal problems. It became obvious that there was no dreamland - in fact some of them turned out (admittedly) to be among the worst societies on earth. Most important for mass support was the abandonment of the Cultural Revolution by China. I do not wish here to discuss whether the CR was right and necessary or not (though I think that there were at least some right and necessary elements in it). The result, in any case, of presenting the Cultural Revolution as a hell on earth, and many of the leaders as corrupt fascists, was that the naive "Messianic" illusions about China collapsed. In addition, there were the Vietnamese boat people, there was the attack on Kampuchea (which was condemned by various Western

officials and later also by the Soviet Union and Vietnam as a state perpetrating mass murder on its own people - and this image completely carried Western public opinion, though still nevertheless a lie), at the same time the belief that the main aspect of the Soviet Union prior to 1956 was positive also collapsed for many Maoists, under pressure from all the other disclosures of untrue propaganda.

So Western Maoism lost what had been its trump card and rallying cry in the early '70s: the widespread belief (in the radical parts of the student and youth movements anyway) that the movement (maybe, at least) had the alternative, was gone. From the simple belief in the miracle answer, to cynical distrust and to doubt that any cure is possible. A strong card had suddenly been transformed into a weak one, even a burden.

This new vision is just as dogmatic, just as un-scientific as the one it replaces. Concrete investigation shows that socialism to date around the world has achieved great results, and has justified itself. But this doesn't mean that it has fulfilled (or even can) all the utopian dreams of the radical youth of the '70s. Most important, to understand socialism a different attitude towards investigation and concrete knowledge is needed than what was typical of the student and youth movement (and the official, standard Maoist propaganda from China).

As well, the fight against Soviet social imperialism became more politically demanding during the '70s. There are several reasons for this: the USSR launched a strong international campaign and through pressure and bribery gained many new allies; at the same time China made contacts with many Western countries, including the US, something the Soviets took advantage of in an energetic propaganda campaign.

In the early '60s, then, in terms of theory the picture for someone with little political experience was fairly simple: on the one hand China - for revolution, for classical Marxism, for liberation movements and the third world, isolated from US imperialism and the rest of the main Western countries. On the other hand, the Soviet Union - for peaceful, parliamentary transition, against revolution, against all liberation movements, claiming that classical Marxism was outdated, for "peaceful coexistence", and dividing the world with US imperialism and the West.

Confronted with this new student and youth movement, the Soviet and very openly right-oriented, pro-Soviet parties seemed uncomprehending, clumsy and openly hostile.

Towards the end of the '70s, the Soviet Union was able to bribe and take over many liberation movements in the third world. Pro-Soviet parties on suitable occasions declared themselves "revolutionary" (though in fact they were often fascist coups d'etat such as in Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Angola), armed their propaganda with "orthodox" phrases. The USSR came into sharper confrontation with the US and criticised China with "cooperating with imperialism", rallied activists from the anti-imperialist struggle in the third world, and from the student and youth movement in the West. In Norway, SV members (among them former Maoists) started arguing for Soviet "anti-imperialist policy", citing Soviet support for liberation movements", and even saying that the USSR was a "positive counterbalance to US imperialism" when the Soviet navy conducted exercises off the west coast of Iceland.

The Swedish author Sara Lidmann is a typical example of this turnaround. In the 1960s she cooperated with the Swedish Maoists in the Vietnam movement (to which the pro-Soviet revisionists were

extremely hostile). Today in the 1980s she supports the most pro-Soviet forces in Sweden. To put it simply: she has followed Vietnam.

As a consequence, many Maoist parties lost the battle for anti-imperialist opinion, which they had dominated before. This was not politically inevitable. It was predicted that the increasingly aggressive character of the USSR would broaden the foundations of an anti-imperialist mass movement against social imperialism. In the '80s this happened, especially after Afghanistan and Poland. But most of the Maoist parties were politically incapable of meeting the needs of a much more complicated situation than that of the 1966-70 period, and were therefore not in a position to develop and lead this movement.

The entire anti-imperialist political tendency itself entered a crisis. The difficulties in mobilizing mass support for different liberation movements in the third world increased, at least by comparison with the early '70s.

There were several reasons for this. Simple, "Messianic" support for liberation wars, like the old Vietnam movement, necessarily turned to cynical disappointment. "What are we actually supporting?" Western and Soviet propaganda about "reactionary regimes in the third world" could take advantage of the fact that there are many such regimes (and many of them have also come to power as a result of a liberation war). Generally, I think the masses in the West are much more conscious of imperialism now than they were, for instance, in 1965. But imperialist propaganda has, at the same time, had an impact on many people. Racism and Euro-chauvinism are used: "Idi Amin, the Ayatollah Khomeini, Pol Pot, Muslim woman oppressors, Arab oil sheiks, Latin American fascists"... "What's the use of supporting them?" The student movement, which used to be able to fill the streets with lightning actions, isn't there any more. And many anti-imperialists are now much more afraid of supporting the concrete struggles of the third world. With the Maoists in 1970: great enthusiasm for working for Vietnam; in 1980: lots of scepticism about supporting Kampuchea.

5.2 Intellectual Roots - Important "second-level" questions: Problems for the theoreticians

During this process of breakdown, at the same time, the problems of "the innermost parts" of the movement grew - the problems, that is, among the most theoretically educated cadres, many ideologists and leaders. These leaders had followed up and developed on the Messianic and utopian view of socialism with comprehensive theoretical studies, which led them to believe that they understood how socialist society functioned, and how it was possible to avoid a degeneration of socialism towards capitalism and fascism, a la Soviet Union. To arrive at this "understanding" they had more or less swallowed the Chinese and Albanian rhetoric produced for domestic consumption as honest and objective & scientific descriptions. They had studied and defended apologetical descriptions of the excellent situation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Stalin period. They had even, in some cases, loyally followed the official Chinese orientation in foreign policy, reading Kim Il Sung and Ceausescu, and had stretched their minds to make what they knew about the development of Korea and Romainia fit the picture of harmoniously flowering socialism.

(To avoid misunderstanding, I must declare that I myself 56 belonged to the group I am now describing.)

Up until 1976, theories of the Cultural Revolution in China were central to this construction. The condemnation of the Cultural Revolution and the official about-face which followed it, combined with the fact that Mao's theories of socialism from 1957 (or maybe 1949) were rejected, acted like a violent earthquake on these groups.

Moreover, it became evident to everybody that what China officially called socialism was not the result of the "approval" of the Chinese leadership after a thorough and scientific analysis of the development of these countries. It was simply a part of tactical diplomacy. For instance, it became apparent that the negative internal developments in Vietnam had started a long time before 1978-79 - that is, in a period when Chinese official opinion still held Vietnam to be a socialist country. With China's approval of Yugoslavia as socialist, it was impossible not to see this.

With the condemnation of the Cultural Revolution and the rejection of central parts of the polemics against the CPSU in the 60s, the old picture of the "complete" polemics against revisionism collapsed. Now China was doing many of the same things for which the CPC had earlier criticised the Soviet Union: allowing more free markets, opening the way for increasing salary differences, allowing foreign companies to set up shop, and so on. At the same time, the CPC leadership dropped parts of Mao's criticism of Stalin: it supported Stalin's view of classes under socialism (that there is no bourgeoisie). The formal freedom to post wall posters and the right to strike were removed. Has China then become revisionist and capitalist? Or is the earlier criticism exaggerated - and is the Soviet Union a socialist country? If neither is true - and other combinations are untrue - how can this theoretical construction be patched together again?

What is socialism, in fact? "We thought we knew, but we don't know any more." "Is socialism actually superior to capitalism?" "Is socialism really possible, after all/" "Is it possible, but only in the future, not in our time?"

Closely connected with these questions are those concerned with the history and analysis of Eastern Europe: the evaluation of the Stalin period; "was there ever really socialism?" "Did the counter-revolution really take place at all - in 1935, in 1928, in 1923?" "Are revisionism and new class societies in reality an inevitable consequence on Leninism?" For the most theory-oriented (comrades in Germany, for example) it was often a problem that Eastern European, anti-Maoist and anti-"orthodox" critics actually had a more interesting and comprehensive description of the developments in Eastern Europe than did the Chinese and Albanian pamphlets. Thus, for instance, the breakthrough of Bahro in these circles, even though his theories were mixed with obviously fantastic and utopian ideas which are not difficult to criticise. Obviously the theoretical ability to make such criticism was lacking.

Also closely related to these questions is the matter of democracy - of the "democratic credibility" of the Maoist Communists. The West is intensely bourgeois democratic: these ideas are among the most important features of the common Western cultural heritage. Criticism of the "democratic credibility" of communism has been a trump card for bourgeois propaganda for years.

Communists have answered it by pointing to the (real or asserted) economic and social triumphs of socialism, by criticising capitalism of hypocritical, false democracy (which is quite right, of course), by rejecting the entire problem, and often (especially for internal use among the most revolutionary and dissatisfied supporters) by stating that all talk about democratic, human rights and so on is bourgeois prejudice and illusion.

This is unsatisfactory. Large sections of the Western Maoists never were satisfied with this kind of answer, and probably never will be. Developments in Eastern Europe really pinpoint the question of democratic rights, while the Soviet oppressors are using arguments against the criticisms that are fetched from the traditional communist answers. The basic theoretical problem, moreover, is that this kind of argument has been used to avoid critical analysis of assaults against the working people, communists and revolutionaries during the dictatorship of the proletariat. Terror during the Stalin period did not hit only Kulaks involved in criminal activities, spies and bourgeois. It also hit socialists, pro-Soviet intellectuals, and communists. Generally, the domestic politics of the Stalin period did serve the interests of the working class, in the long and in the short run, while policy under Khrushchev and Brezhnev have served the new bourgeoisie. But the political position of the workers was in reality not very different in the last part of the Stalin period (1950s) from that in the first part of the Khrushchev period. The workers obeyed. Their freedom of speech was limited. Their individual freedom and security in law was extremely weak, taking into account historical conditions. And so on.

Theory therefore served to hide the real problems of socialism instead of analysing them. And it made it more difficult for communists to struggle whole-heartedly and lead the fight for democratic rights in other parts of the world.

Western Maoist ideologists early in the '70s could answer with a mixture of the traditional communist examples, and reference to China, where "it's not like that (like the Soviet Union)." In China there are wall posters, the right to strike, mass democracy. Besides, they knew that they would never terrorize critics, harass the working class, and so on.

But when the illusions about the Cultural Revolution broke, this defence also broke. Much of what was criticised in the Stalin period seemed to be true for China as well (not to mention Albania - and Vietnam!) And what about Kampuchea? Does Maoist ideology state that "the end justifies the means"? Can, then, all sorts of means be accepted in the name of some end in the distant future?

The result was that among the most "Maoist Maoists" there were intellectuals who went down on their knees, regretting their sins, back to "the house of their fathers". Not only did they give up defending injustice under socialism, they gave up defending socialism itself. They gathered around current Western ideas of bourgeois democracy, threw away the well-founded and correct criticisms the communists have made of the falseness and hypocrisy of this democracy, and turned into defenders of the ruling, Western establishment.

5.3 The Missing Theory - Important "third-level" questions: 58
The main problem of Western Maoist Theory

But the most fundamental of the problems of Western Maoism was not thoroughly discussed in connection with "the breakdown".

At most, the echo of the problem appeared in the grieving cry, "Why didn't the working class show up?"

The problem is that "classical" Maoism did not contain any specific theory for the advanced, Western capitalist countries. Moreover, it didn't even theoretically understand that this theory was missing.

This theoretical problem was of course present earlier, for instance in the early '70s. But at that time and internal matter such as this did not pose such an acute problem because the favourable "external" development concealed it. It is like having holes in your shoes. As long as the weather remains dry, you can get along just fine. But when the rain is pouring down and it is cold, your feet get wet and you can even get pneumonia.

As long as the student and youth movement unhesitatingly gave their support, and could be mobilized for enthusiastic meetings and to fill the streets, the "internal" weaknesses in Maoism were hidden. When the movement disappeared, and its enthusiasm could no longer be used as living proof that "we are marching forward and we are right", then the internal shortcomings appeared and grew acute, and developed into holes through which the external crisis penetrated.

It is true that "classical" Maoism (often criticising earlier dogmatism) said that "Marxism-Leninism-MaoZedong-Thought must be applied according to the concrete circumstances of each country." This quite correct thesis is by itself, however, not enough. It applies both for Thailand and Germany, both for India and Norway. But the problem has quite a different importance in Germany and Norway than in Thailand and India. In the latter countries the Maoists have also made mistakes by transferring Chinese models to societies which are different; but the Western capitalist societies are enormously more different from China than are Thailand and India.

Neither is it the same question in these latter countries as "why didn't the working class show up?" We have to know the society in which we work, to know if this is the right question to ask. If the working class always "showed up" as long as "the line was correct", then a large, enthusiastic revolutionary movement would always be possible. But history shows us it isn't like that. We can, at least by using extreme examples, show that there are situations where it cannot happen: white workers in South Africa, and Jewish industrial workers in Israel are, no doubt, a kind of "working class". But it is plain historical idealism to expect them, for instance, in the '70s, to lay foundations for a communist or anti-imperialist movement. Such extreme examples cannot, of course, be transferred to the hundreds of millions who make up the working class in the West. But they do show that it is not enough to say the word "working class" and thereby decide that there is a mass base for a revolutionary movement in the near future.

Because of this defect, Western Maoism could understand itself only in an incomplete and erroneous way. It can be put together as follows:

- " Our movement corresponds objectively to the objective interests of the Western working class.
- . Therefore we are the party of the Western working class.
- . We have a complete theory of Socialism which also includes a critique of what went wrong with the Soviet revolution.
- . We have a sufficient and complete theory of how Western

- . Therefore we are the party of the Western working class.
- . We have a complete theory of Socialism which also includes a 59 critique of what went wrong with the Soviet revolution.
- . We have a sufficient and complete theory of how Western capitalism operates.
- . We have a complete strategy and tactics for developing the communist movement and preparing the revolution in our countries.
- . Therefore the working class & and the working masses will rally around us, if only we are able to work long enough, and broadly enough, if only the economic crisis and the world situation develop more, so that the people can experience that we are right."

The list expresses in summary form the gaps in our self-understanding. Briefly, I think it is more right near the top and less right the farther down you go.

It is right that this movement, objectively and in the long run, corresponded to the interests of the Western working class. Because no other movement did so in those years, we might in a way call it "the party of the working class".

But it never was "the real party of the working class" because it was unable to blend with the real and subjective movement of the working class. It became an organization or group of organizations in and of the student and youth movement, working towards the working class, but without any developed understanding of what was needed to make the leap across the separation, and in general it did not make that leap.

It had, generally, a better theory of socialism than anybody else did. The same could be said, with some reservations, about its theory of capitalism. But history has shown that these theories were incomplete and had basic defects. If we could by some fantastic stretching of the imagination suppose that a Western Maoist party had grown enormously and come to power in some Western country in 1975, could we imagine that this party would be able to engineer the construction of socialism? I doubt it.

Above all, we lacked the theoretical understanding of all the specific problems in the West. There, the superstructure, government bureaucracy, the intellectuals, the media and so on play a very important role in defending capitalism and tying the masses to it. The upswing in capitalist economies after World War II was used to build different kinds of "welfare societies", often with social-democratic constructions, to tie the organized working class to the system and make ordinary workers cooperate to gain advantage (real advantage!). This has not changed the character of capitalism. It has not put an end to exploitation, imperialism, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. But in the West this must be considered, in addition to the classical and still valid analyses of Lenin.

However, at the same time orthodox Marxism-Leninism has scarcely been developed in the West since Lenin. Gramsci partly saw the problem, had interesting ideas, but also made idealistic mistakes. Stalin, DMITROV and others in the Comintern made important tactical theoretical contributions (for instance, on the united front against fascism), but fell short of Gramsci as far as truly developing Marxism is concerned.

It was in China that Marxist analysis was developed during those years. But what did the Western communist movement get from Maoism that was new and useful for its situation? Beyond

philosophy, an international analysis, "the three worlds theory", nothing concrete about these countries themselves.

The Chinese are scarcely to blame for this! They did, after all, not "wear the shoe". The "green" Western Maoists were not strong enough to take up this task. They were not even able to understand it. The orthodox criticism of revisionism in the West had concentrated on stating which of the valid theses of Marxism were rejected by the Soviet Union and its satellite states, not on what inadequacies existed in the older and more correct "orthodox" theory. And in this Western movement there were dogmatists (and external influences, like the Albanian Party) who did not want the theory to develop a criticism of the failings of Stalinist orthodoxy.

We have said that the most serious weaknesses in Western Maoism were in the areas of tactics and concrete policy. Around the major theoretical issues there was a surprising degree of unanimity. Around Western problems - whether or not to work in the unions, for or against the struggle of the small peasants, for or against participation in (parliamentary) elections, and so on - the most widely diverging and far-fetched lines jostled. For here, Maoism had said nothing about our countries! Some picked out general statements from Mao and tried to apply them to the West. Others used the European program of the Comintern from the '20s, while others mobilized opposite tactical lines from the Comintern of the '30s. A more comprehensive debate, however, based on the understanding that such problems had to be solved by concrete investigation and analysis rather than by a feverish search for ready-made solutions, did not develop.

Thus we saw the independent Maoist youth organization UJCMF in France, in the summer of 1968, trying to develop the uprising through a "Long March" to the countryside to extend the spread of revolutionary ideas. Its successor organization, Gauche proletarienne, (1970) tried to wage armed struggle against Gaullism under the slogan "la nouvelle resistance". But French peasants were not Chinese, and did not have the same political response as the peasants living "outside politics" in the poor Chinese interior in the '30s. Neither was de Gaulle's France an occupied country, where the masses would be prepared for supporting anti-fascist partisans.

For the largest Maoist movements in the West, in those countries which had known fascism, it became a big theoretical and practical problem that they had a program for fighting fascism, but they had no program for continuing a concrete, revolutionary struggle under bourgeois democracy. For organizations like the Spanish ORT, I think this was their problem - that they had considerable mass support and lots of expectations, but no program that would enable them to use this strength under new circumstances. The general political doctrine on which they had based themselves did not give them any guidelines that could be of some value under "normal" circumstances in the West. So they collapsed.

We can also see that the great changes taking place in society, beginning early in the '70s with the initial breakthrough of the computer revolution, never became an important subject for investigations and debate for the new Maoist movement in the West.

The movement was of the West, it had its body in the West, but it never had its thoughts completely in the West, or not in the present time. From this follows the amazing propensity of the movement to walk into lampposts on empty streets or to fall into

open ditches in broad daylight.

From this also follows another irony- developments in the West awarded Maoism with a number of theoretical victories:

- Mao's brilliant analysis of the world situation, the three-worlds theory, the increasing danger of world war, the increasingly aggressive character of social imperialism, all were shown to be correct;
- the crisis in the West became more severe, with mass unemployment, the number of strikes rose, and it became impossible for the theoreticians of capitalism to maintain the claim that Western capitalism could avoid crisis - old Marx's "dogmatism" was confirmed;
- big strikes and mass movements confirmed the Maoist analysis that capitalism had been restored in Eastern Europe, and that moreover it was a very brutal and unstable capitalism which in the short term had to face big crises.

Such views had been rejected as fantastic inventions when the Maoists stood alone in holding them in the early 1970s. What happened when the ideas began to bread through in many parts of society at the approach of the 1980s?

The Maoist movement in Europe collapsed and disappeared. Its development followed its own rules. It was "not of the big, European world", but of "two small worlds": "the world of the student and youth movement" and "the world of the Western Chinese-oriented communists". During its political winter in the big, European world, the pink roses of spring bloomed in its two small worlds. Romantic young student Maoists were intoxicated in the student movement and steeped in the far-away Cultural Revolution. But when the "big world" thawed and became ripe for these ideas, spring was over in the "two small worlds". The students saw only black brambles and turned home, disappointed.

The Maoist parties lacked a self-knowledge that might have enabled them to understand how to make the leap between these different worlds, or that a leap was necessary.

They did not understand that it is never enough to have a "correct line" for the objective and long-term movement, unless it is possible to link this up with the real, concrete and subjective movement. They believed it was sufficient to be right objectively, without playing a subjectively useful role now. With this kind of underlying attitude, confirmation by events of the theories they embraced for some served to deepen the ideological crisis: Still the masses did not show up. Cadre-level militants who had based all their political work on a theoretical world-view and analysis began to feel the sky was falling. They were like a gambler who had won the big lottery and then discovered that they wouldn't pay him the prize money. "You can't trust anybody anymore." "Nothing works the way it should."

The various reactions among Western Maoists illustrate the different reactions of intellectual cadres when the superstructure of a movement (the theory) collapses. Many rank-and-file members just quietly disappeared. Some theoretical specialists tried to follow the new "Chinese turn", just as they(we) had earlier followed other "turns". The problem, however, is that it is now the official line of the CCP that parties like the Italian, French, Spanish and English revisionist parties are real communist parties. What, then, is the logical consequence for Maoists who

have spent several years fighting such parties? For some, it is to do a self-criticism and join them. Or to join correspondingly "radical" parties like the social democrats in England, Germany, France or Scandinavia.

Others took another look and the central theses of "classical Maoism", suddenly discovered all kinds of errors, and hysterically turned to the other extreme - from "everything right" to "everything wrong" - abandoning communism without much ado. This was the case for the majority of the leaders who closed down KPD in Germany.

Still others escaped into sectarian monastery-like organizations and turned their backs on all problems by clinging to dogmatic, ritualistic communism: "The Chinese are traitors, everything they criticize is by definition right. Everybody in the whole world is against us, we are 'the only true Christians', defending ourselves in the ideological catacombs against all outsiders." To keep the organization together they escaped into the ideological camp of the Albanian "Minintern" or "Gang of Four" tendency.

Despite the outward difference in form, in content the latter reactions are closely connected. Both are emotional and ideological reactions, not rational or scientific ones. They both express the search of the student and youth movement for ideals and absolutes - absolutely right or absolutely wrong. They continue the "orthodox" communist heritage of either 150% support for an ideal society and mother party, or a complete break with communism.

Who managed to avoid all of these pitfalls?

Not Many. No one completely.

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(Notes from a chapter of a Norwegian book by a member of the AKP(ML))

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