

Where Maoism is after Mao

by Albert Langer

TWO YEARS AFTER Mao Tse-tung's death, it seems that Maoism, or "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought", is going out of fashion.

In China, systematically and in every field, Mao's policies are being reversed, his achievements dismantled and his supporters suppressed, while of course the greatest respect is shown to his corpse, now stuffed and displayed in a glass case, like Lenin's in Russia, as a harmless icon to console the masses.

China's Cultural Revolution, which inspired progressives around the world, is now portrayed as a dark period in Chinese history, when everything was ruined, not by Mao of course, but by Chiang Ching the "Kuomintang renegade" he was married to for 40 years.

From Albania too, we learn that Mao was a "bourgeois nationalist" and that his foreign policy was an attempt to instigate war between the USA and USSR so that China could dominate a devastated world.

Throughout the world, groups that once supported Mao Tse-tung are being skillfully lined up into two great camps — one of puffed up parrots who "warmly hail the great victory over the gang of four", and the other falling in behind Albania.

While Hua Kuo-feng and Teng Hsiao-ping battle out whether to drop the pretence of supporting Mao, the Albanians move steadily towards the view that Mao never was a Marxist, that he was a bourgeois nationalist even in the 1930s, that the Chinese Communist Party was a petit-bourgeois peasant party and so forth.

The new Chinese leaders have delightedly seized the opportunity to split the international communist movement along the lines suggested by Albania's critique of their foreign policy. It has enabled them to win cheap debating victories by trotting out well known propositions on the united front, and to avoid all policies concerning the internal counter-revolution in China.

Despite Albania's description of China as a capitalist superpower, they have in no way expressed support for the "gang of four" or exposed the theoretical bankruptcy of the attacks on them. Both sides are agreed that the Cultural Revolution was a mess, that it led to chaos and disruption, that Mao was wrong to go against a majority of the Central Committee and especially wrong to use his personal authority and the Red Guards to bypass or smash opposition within the party.

Both sides reject Mao's concept that there is a bureaucratic bourgeois class right inside the Communist Party, and that this is the target of revolution in a socialist society.

Even so perceptive an "independent Maoist" as Charles Bettelheim refuses to qualify support for the "gang of four". Bettelheim's critique of the "Great Leap Backward" does strongly defend the Cultural Revolution and denounce its enemies. But he concludes that Mao's revolutionary line suffered defeat "because, in a certain way, it had failed" (his emphasis).

Forgetting that revolutionaries are a minority in every society, Bettelheim's



analysis abstractly contrasts "centralism", "power in the hands of the party" and "coercion" against "democracy", "power in the hands of the masses", and "freedom of expression".

So it seems we unreconstructed Maoists are a vanishing species.

Some are discovering that Tito and Liu Shao-chi were right all along.

Some are contemplating discoveries to which Lin Piao and Moscow already hold the copyright.

Some are toying with a critique of the Bolshevik one — party dictatorship that was made more coherently by the reformist Karl Kautsky back in 1918.

Maoism is, it seems, completely discredited.

Or is it?

Something similar happened when the Second International completely renounced revolutionary Marxism after the deaths of Marx and Engels. If Marxism had been wrong, it would have died out then. But it turned out to be dead right, and was reborn with the victory of the Russian revolution in October 1917.

If Mao was wrong, then Maoism will certainly disappear. But I rather doubt it.

Was Mao wrong about what would happen in China after his death?

He wrote into the Chinese Party and State Constitutions the concept that throughout the whole historical period of socialism class struggle and the struggle between the socialist and capitalist road continue, the question of which will win out remains undecided and political revolutions like the Cultural Revolution will have to be carried out many times.

He pointed out that China was still a society based on commodity production, exchange through money and work for wages, and that therefore a capitalist

system could easily be consolidated. He insisted that "the bourgeoisie is right inside the Communist Party, the capitalist roaders are still on the capitalist road".

According to Mao:

"If the Right were to stage an anti-Communist coup d'etat in China, I am sure they would have no peace either and their rule would most probably be short-lived, because it would never be tolerated by the revolutionaries who represent the interests of the people constituting more than 90 percent of the population. The future is bright; the road is tortuous."

The fact that there has indeed been a coup, and the road has indeed proved tortuous, hardly suggests that Mao was wrong. He would be wrong if the Right in China were now to enjoy a peaceful advance to the "four modernizations" at great speed.

If Mao is right however, then China will now enter a period of increasing class polarization in circumstances where an awful lot of Chinese understand the process and know what to do about it.

If Mao is right, the working class will now be pushed out of power in all areas of Chinese society, as a class of bureaucrats is consolidated with the aid of material incentives, managerial privileges, an elitist education system and so on. "The Marxist-Leninist party would undoubtedly become a revisionist party or a fascist party and the whole of China would change its color."

But if Mao was right, that working class will not be as docile as in the Soviet Union

and Eastern Europe. It will be a working class that has experienced the practical exercise of political power at all levels of Chinese society, whose leaders have already been through the experience of the Cultural Revolution, have already known what it is to "swim against the tide" and be branded a counter-revolutionary, expelled from the Communist Party and gaoled by bureaucrats, and have already learned once how to fight back and overthrow those bureaucrats.

If Mao was right, then we will see the Chinese peasants also pushed out of power, and the gap between town and country widened again, as "modernization" follows the traditional path of squeezing the peasants to build big industries in the cities instead of industrializing the communes at the same time.

But if Mao was right, that peasantry, reinforced by some 20 million Red Guards and other educated youth from the cities sent to the countryside as a strategic move at the height of the Cultural Revolution, will know how to fight back.

If Mao was wrong about the international situation then the Soviet Union will not emerge as a fascist threat similar to Nazi Germany and all the fuss about "Soviet social imperialism" will prove diversionary. But if Mao was right we will see a real threat and a real united front against Soviet fascism developing to stop it, with allies as unlikely as were Churchill and Stalin or Chiang Kai-shek and Mao.

Personally I think that Mao will be proved right on all counts. The resistance already active in China, and the growing split between Hua and Teng confirm that the political institutions Mao left behind are inherently unstable. No bureaucrat there will ever establish anything resembling "legitimacy". Hau's successors will also face continuous upheavals both from their rivals and from the masses. "They would have no peace".

Outside China as well as within, Maoists are obviously in for a period of confusion and turmoil (but isn't everybody?)

There has never yet been a revolution in an advanced capitalist country yet it looks like we are heading for another period of crises and wars and are going to have to figure out for ourselves how to go about it.

Mao is reported to have once said: "Once we give in to blind faith our minds become cramped and our thought cannot burst out of its confinement. Unless you have a conquering spirit it is very dangerous to study Marxism-Leninism".

The confusion and turmoil among Maoists is at least forcing people to uncramp their minds and get down to the basics of what we are on about.

Those whose minds got so cramped by their study of Marxism-Leninism that they turned into parrots have now departed. We are well rid of them because it is quite impossible to imagine a revolution led by a parrot. □



HONG KONG (AFP) — A 16-volume collection containing all the 168 fairy tales and stories by Hans Christian Andersen have been reprinted recently by the Shanghai Translation Publishing House, New China News Agency has reported. Publication of Andersen's work stopped under the "cultural Autocracy" of the Gang of Four radical

leaders who were purged two years ago. This year, in addition to the republication of collections of Andersen's tales a million copies of a selection made specially for children is to be issued. It is aimed at Chinese literary workers, educationists and children.