Behind split in the RCP

By David Frankel

During the 1960s, Maoism became an influential current among radical youth around the world. Over the past few years, however, the Maoists have been beset by a deep political crisis. Many of their earlier gains have been eroded as a result.

The most recent indication of this crisis here in the United States came this January when the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) split. The RCP had been the largest Maoist organization in the country, but the split took 40 percent of its membership (or somewhat less than one third, depending on which side one believes). The RCP also lost the majority of its youth organization.

Similar factional struggles and splits have been taking place in Maoist groups all over the world. The explanation for this development is to be found in the policies of the Chinese regime.

Pro-imperialist policy

Under Mao’s direction, the Peking regime began to follow an openly pro-imperialist foreign policy in the early 1970s. The Chinese welcomed Khrushchev’s visits to Moscow in early 1972, at the same time that the US war on Vietnam was being publicly denounced as counterrevolutionary by Peking.

After Mao designated the Soviet regime as the main enemy of the people of the world, the right-wing character of Peking’s foreign policy became increasingly apparent.

In the name of opposing the supposed “imperialists,” the Chinese backed imperialist war spending and called for strengthening the NATO alliance.

The RCP continued: “And how, we must ask, does OL’s version of the Peking regime’s policy, Mao’s betrayals were defended as the ‘towering crimes’ of the four.” The article continued:

Gang of four

In October 1976—only six weeks after Mao’s death—the Chinese Communist Party officially announced the purge of the “gang of four.” The “gang” included Chiang Ching, Mao’s widow, as well as three other top party leaders who had been most closely associated with the dead tyrant.

It soon became clear that the attack on the "gang of four" was really an attack on Mao himself. An article by Les Evans in the December 31, 1976, Militant summed up the situation less than four months after Mao’s death:

“Now the Chinese press has launched a massive campaign to expose the ‘towering crimes’ of the four. The campaign has turned into a broadside attack on the economic and cultural policies of the Mao regime over the last decade.”

The disgrace of Mao’s closest followers and the rehabilitation of his chief enemies in the party hierarchy has been accompanied by the rapid dismantling of the remnants of Mao’s “Cultural Revolution.”

Thus, Maoist groups around the world, which had originally been built around opposition to imperialism and questioning loyalty to Mao and glorification of his personal leadership, have had their foundations pulled from under them.

Under these circumstances, the CP(ML) chose to retain its identification with the Peking regime at all costs—even if it meant repudiating policies that had defended unfailingly for years.

RCP sympathizer C. Clark Kissinger had some justice on his side when he remarked in November 1976 in regard to the purge of Mao’s faction, “If a chimpanzee had been elected chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, he would have gotten a telegram of congratulations from [CP(ML) Chairman] Michael Klionsky.”

RCP shuts up

However, the RCP is hardly in a position to fault its supposed dedication to principle. For a year and a half the RCP maintained total silence on the purge in China and on the new internal policies being followed by the regime.

As in the debate on Peking’s foreign policy, RCP Chairman Bob Avakian thought he could cheat his way out of political difficulties. When Avakian was no longer able to evade the political issues within his own organization, he proposed that the RCP adopt a position in support of the deposed Mao faction, but that its backing for the “gang of four” he kept secret from all but the RCP’s most trusted supporters.

Not even all those in the Revolutionary Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) knew that the RCP shut up, as Avakian said.

Behind split in the RCP

Rifts in Peking bureaucracy tear apart U.S. Maoists

Demonstrators wave Mao’s little red book during Cultural Revolution. RCP split after Mao’s successors began reversing many policies initiated during Cultural Revolution and downplaying Mao cult.
Kuo-feng has begun to make concessions of his own under the basic structure of bureaucratic rule. But Avakian wants none of this. He declares, "We must expose the Mao regime. In a report titled, "Revisionists are Revisionists and Must Not Be Supported," he denounces "the Leaders of the Revolution, the Revisionists and Must Be Supported," as well as Avakian's followers. Readers who have now usurped supreme power in China and are taking China into a period of reformation.

In the field of culture and art, Avakian charged, the new line "is to let a bunch of bourgeois professors and so-called intellectuals..." Even "such things as Shakespeare, Greek mythology, the piano compositions of Beethoven, and the drawings of Rembrandt, etc., are being allowed into China..."

Two totalitarian cults are, like loyal members of the Catholic church, expected to abide by an index of prohibited works.

Avakian's position on China was narrowly adopted by the RCP leadership in December, but a substantial minority, led by RCP Central Committee member Mickey Jarvis, opposed the new line.

Not surprisingly, the Maoist-Stalinist organization that Avakian and his followers have built up in China is proving totally incapable of carrying out any kind of democratic discussion. An open letter to the Jarvis faction in the RCBY (remained the Revolutionary Student Brigade), describes how the City any attempt to censure Avakian's followers in China.

"They came complete with chains, balaclavas, blackjackets and attacked our meeting at the RCP New York City Office of the Brigade. Six foot six goons wielding baseball bats clubbed women and men.

Nor is the Jarvis faction ready to talk out the issues with its former leaders in the RCP that group stood up with the rest of the RCP and applauded Avakian in the stare-down with the rival group considered obligatory for public appearances by the "Chairman." Now, however, they are referring themselves to "Piquevous Avakian." This particular piece in the debate between Jarvis and Avakian is a caricature of Avakian with the caption, "This short person's got no reason to live."

Double-talk from Avakian

To this day, Avakian has refused to admit publicly that the issue of China was involved in the split of the RCP. When it comes to the central issue in the split, the leaders of Revolution are treated to obscure hints. Thus, in the April-May Revolution, a lengthy article on the Chinese regime.

What "vitally important developments" precipitated the split? What are the "independent analyses" of the Chinese regime? Referencing the RCP Central Committee meeting where the fight came out, the open, it says: "The Central Committee met to discuss vitally important developments which served to concentrate the two lines within the Party. And the resolution of this... was that the revisionist line and splintering and wrecking bureaucratic rule.

Another article in the April-May Revolution is devoted to extolling "Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions," never mentioning the role of the current Chinese leadership. Avakian clearly preparing to quote Mao against his successors.

Who is for Chinese people?

Jarvis, who has organized the "Revolutionary Workers Headquarters" in the Maoist regime, Jarvis who has organized the "Revolutionary Workers Headquarters..."

"You can only do one thing about the origins of the dispute. Jarvis's faction makes its case in an article titled "Uncovering the Young Communist Alliance. The article, titled "Counterfeited Crew Unmasked," says that the "gang of four" turned their backs on the Chinese people, and that by refusing to support the Hua regime, the "Avakianistas" have also chosen to turn their backs on the Chinese people.

Yes, the Mao faction did turn its back on the Chinese people. A regime that failed to represent the Chinese masses would have had no need for the tyrannical methods used by Mao.

But what about Jarvis, who hopes to pawn himself off as the representative of 900 million Chinese? Is he any better? Jarvis picks winner

The regime that Jarvis supports has just admitted that for the past ten years, the Chinese government has been systematically framing up and victimizing innocent people. Jarvis supports an organization that education, cultural life, and economic progress were badly hurt. Revolutionists in the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialist Alliance were pointing out these facts at the time, while Jarvis was energetically defending the Mao regime.

Does Jarvis now say that it is necessary to discuss how it was possible for such crimes to be carried out by a supposedly socialist government? Does the fact that he himself has made a reassessment of the past is now in order?

No. Instead, he jumps to denounced a person "personally defensive and assures everybody that things are now fine in China.

But how does Jarvis know that things are fine? Why should he be any more correct this time around than last time?

The simple fact is that Jarvis is defending the interests of the current Chinese government, not of the Chinese people. This split between Avakian and Jarvis is not over revolutionary politics, but over which bureaucratic clique to defend. Unlike Avakian, who remains loyal to Mao, Jarvis wants to go with the "more correct this time around than last time.

Unfortunately for Jarvis, the Peking regime already has an authorized voice in the United States—Chairman Michael Klionsky of the CPUSA. Unless Jarvis can secure a second front from Peking for his future as an "independent" leader appears dim.

"Excellent situation?"

As for Jarvis, he is simply continuing his policy of trying to lie and bully his way out of difficulties. After the loss of the majority of his youth organization and at least a third of the RCP, he insists in the February issue of Revolution.

"All told, the situation in the RCYB is truly excellent, and the basis is laid for even further advances in organizing among students and youth."

In case bravado like this is not enough to reassure his shrinking membership, Jarvis has launched a series of violent attacks on other groups on the left to insulate the RCP from political discussion.

His thugs have assaulted meetings held in solidarity with the coal miners in their recent strikes, meetings in defense of democratic rights in Iran, and, of course, their own former comrades in the Revolutionary Socialist Brigade.

This frenziness, however, cannot save Avakian and the RCP, any more than Jarvis's toadyism to Peking can assure success for the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters.

In the long run, there is no future for groups claiming to be socialist unless they have a program based on the interests of the international working class. As a result, anyone who thought a reassessment of the past is now in order for Jarvis is sadly mistaken. As the breakup of the Movement continues, hopefully many will choose instead the road of revolutionary socialism.

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