

Behind split in the RCP

Rifts in Peking bureaucracy tear apart U.S. Maoists

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. This was symbolized by Mao's warm reception for Richard Nixon in Peking in February 1972, at the same time that U.S. warplanes were raining death on Vietnam.

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 Soviet threat, Peking has backed imperialist war spending and called for strengthening the NATO alliance. The Maoist regime has also backed many of the most repressive capitalist dictatorships, such as those in Iran and Chile, on the basis of their strong opposition to Moscow.

These reactionary policies have been hard to swallow for groups that were originally built up on the basis of opposition to imperialism during the Vietnam War. In the United States, Mao's course finally led to a debate within the Maoist milieu when the *Guardian* newspaper criticized Peking's policy in Angola. (Together with Washington, Peking focused its fire against the Soviet and Cuban presence in Angola.)

While the *Guardian* became more and more critical of Peking's foreign policy, Mao's betrayals were defended up and down the line by the October League [OL—now called the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist)].

The RCP took a third course. It tried to squirm out of the dilemma by claiming to defend Peking's policy while misrepresenting that policy, which was to join hands with the imperialists against the USSR. The RCP tried to maintain its anti-imperialist image by attacking OL's version of the Peking line.

Thus, a major article in the January 1977 issue of *Revolution* charged that the OL was falling into "objective unity with U.S. imperialism" because of its focus against the Soviet Union. The article continued:

"And how, we must ask, does OL's agitation around the USSR as the main source of war differ in substance, once it is stripped of its flimsy 'Marxist' cloak, from the agitation and propaganda of the U.S. bourgeoisie itself?"

A good question. However, the RCP should have addressed it not to OL, but to the Maoist regime in Peking. This must have become clear to many RCP members in July 1977, when Peking formally recognized the CP(ML)—OL's successor—as its chosen representative in the United States.

But if the CP(ML) remained true to Mao's foreign policy, which was not



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.

changed after his death, it is the RCP that has been loyal to the domestic policies of the "Great Helmsman."

'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 Ch'ing, 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 unquestioning 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 it had defended unflinchingly 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 Klonsky."

RCP shuts up

However, the RCP is hardly in a position to flaunt 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 defeated Mao faction, but that its backing for the "gang of four" be kept secret from all but the RCP's most trusted supporters.

Not even all those in the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade, the RCP's youth organization, would be told the truth, according to a report by Avakian to the RCP's central committee. "Only those closest to the party within the RCYB should be told our full position," Avakian said.

If Avakian were operating in China, his reticence would not be so strange. Over there, the people with his position are in jail.

But here in the United States, Ava-

kian and his followers are afraid of an open debate that would lead to them being publicly denounced as counterrevolutionaries by Peking.

After all, Avakian is well aware that disagreements in the Maoist movement are not dealt with by democratic, open discussion. The ranks of the RCP, like those of other Maoist groups, have been trained to react on command from Peking. Would they now be able to stand up for their position in defiance of the Chinese government? Avakian obviously hoped he would not have to find out.

What RCP defends

Of course, Avakian may also be aware of the problems involved in defending the record of his hero, now that the Peking regime has begun to tell a little bit of the truth about Mao's rule.

Under Mao's leadership, anyone who expressed the slightest disagreement with the government or the Mao cult was imprisoned or deported to remote "reeducation" camps. Mao's policies left China's educational system in chaos, disrupted the country's economy, and hurt the standard of living of the Chinese masses.

Meanwhile, those who carried out these policies in the name of "class struggle" and "socialist revolution" were living in luxury never dreamed of by the Chinese workers and farmers.

All this has now been admitted by the new rulers in Peking. Discontent among the masses had become evident and was threatening to get out of hand. Just as Khrushchev made concessions to the Soviet masses following the death of Stalin, Chairman Hua

Kuo-feng has begun to make concessions of his own in order to preserve the basic structure of bureaucratic rule.

But Avakian wants none of this. He defends the worst abuses of the Mao regime. In a report titled, "Revisionists are Revisionists and Must Not Be Supported; Revolutionaries are Revolutionaries and Must Be Supported," Avakian declared that "the capitalist-roaders . . . have now usurped supreme power in China and are taking China down the capitalist road."

In the field of culture and art, Avakian charged, the new line "is to let a hundred poisonous weeds bloom. . . ." Even "such things as Shakespeare, Greek mythology, the piano compositions of Beethoven, Chopin and Bach, the drawings of Rembrandt, etc., are being allowed into China. . . ."

True followers of the Mao cult are, like loyal members of the Catholic church, expected to abide by an index of prohibited works.

Maoists 'debate'

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 Jarvis had collaborated in building proved totally incapable of carrying out any kind of democratic discussion. An open letter by the Jarvis faction in the RCYB (renamed the Revolutionary Student Brigade), described the way the debate was conducted by Avakian's followers in Cincinnati:

"They came complete with chains, bats, blackjacks and attacked our members—particularly the National Office of the Brigade. Six foot six goons wielding baseball bats clubbed women."

Nor is the Jarvis faction ready to talk out the issues with its former leader. Jarvis and the others in his group stood up with the rest of the RCP and applauded Avakian in the standing ovations that were considered obligatory for public appearances by the "Chairman." Now, however, they address their open letter to "Pipsqueak Avakian." This particular piece in the debate featured 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, readers of *Revolution* are treated to obscure hints. Thus, in the April-May *Revolution*, a lengthy article on the split never mentions the question of the Chinese regime. Referring to the RCP Central Committee meeting where the fight came out into 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 splitting and wrecking activities of these opportunists were rejected. . . . In future issues of *Revolution* we will further explore and analyze some of these questions."

What "vitally important developments" precipitated the split? What are the questions that *Revolution* plans to "explore and analyze"? Avakian doesn't say.

The same issue of *Revolution* prints Avakian's opening remarks at the RCP's postsplit convention. Here too, Avakian refers only obliquely to what is happening in China. At one point he says:

"Mao understood and constantly taught that one Cultural Revolution would not be enough to prevent capitalist restoration, and he constantly reminded the masses of the possibility of reversals and the danger of revisionist triumph and the rise to power of the bourgeoisie all throughout the socialist transition period."

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 is clearly preparing to quote Mao against his successors.

Who is for Chinese people?

As a defender of the existing Chinese regime, Jarvis, who has organized the "Revolutionary Workers Headquarters," makes no bones about the origin of the dispute.

Jarvis's faction makes its case in an article in the March 1978 issue of *The Young Communist*. The article, titled "Counterfeit 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 Avakianites 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 truly represented the Chinese masses would have had no need for the tyrannical methods used by Mao.

In defending the criminal record of the Mao regime, Avakian acts as an enemy of the Chinese people and of the socialist cause.

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. It admits 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 he suggest that a reassessment of the past is now in order?

No. Instead, he jumps to denounce what he previously defended 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 fact is that Jarvis is defending the interests of the current Chinese government, not of the Chinese people. The quarrel 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 winner.

Unfortunately for Jarvis, the Peking regime already has an authorized toady in the United States—Chairman Michael Klonsky of the CP(ML). Unless Jarvis can secure a second franchise from Peking, his future as an "independent" leader appears dim.

'Excellent' situation?

As for Avakian, 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, Avakian 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 strike, meetings in defense of democratic rights in Iran, and, of course, their own former comrades in the Revolutionary Socialist Brigade.

This frenzy, however, cannot save Avakian and the RCP, any more than Jarvis's toadying 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. Those who thought that Maoism could provide such a program were sadly mistaken. As the breakup of the Maoist movement continues, hopefully many will choose instead the road of revolutionary socialism.

...Blanco

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him from his bed at 4:30 a.m. May 19, a few hours after he had appealed for support to the strike on television.

As of the end of May, Peru remained under a "state of emergency," including curfews, suspension of constitutional rights, and suppression of non-government weeklies. (The daily press and electronic media were already under government control.)

The elections have been postponed from June 4 to June 18, but the May 30 *Washington Post* reported that "it looks increasingly doubtful that the government will proceed with the election on June 18."

"It is generally believed the military was so shaken by the general strike and the ability of the left to organize it that a major reassessment of the government's political agenda is now under way."

...Zaire

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butu said the zone would be cleared of all residents, after which his troops would "shoot at anything that moves within the area."

While imperialist troops helping Mobutu suppress the Shaba rebels, the banks appear to be closing ranks behind his regime. Browning says in the *Monitor* that "reports from New York City say a Citibank consortium is prepared to follow through on plans for another loan for Zaire despite doubtful financial reports. . . ."

...school

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discriminatory funding. They have had older facilities, fewer materials, and generally poorer education.

For example, at the time of the NAACP's lawsuit, reading levels at Andrew Jackson were among the lowest in New York. The two nearest high schools in predominantly white areas had among the highest.

This pattern remains true throughout New York. Schools in the nation's largest city are more segregated today than they were in 1954 when the U.S. Supreme Court decreed that desegregation was the "law of the land."

Judge Dooling failed to rule on one major demand in the NAACP's lawsuit: cross-county busing. Jackson is about one mile from the boundary between New York City and Nassau County, a largely-white area where Blacks are a very small percentage of the student population.

The NAACP urged that children be bused across this boundary in order to desegregate Queens schools. Dooling ducked the question on technical grounds, leaving it open for future litigation.

James Meyerson, the attorney who argued this case for the NAACP, emphasized the importance of Dooling's decision. "Any time we win a civil rights case we are making a significant advancement," he said.

Eli Green, a spokesperson for the New York chapter of the National Student Coalition Against Racism, a group that has been active in the struggle to desegregate Jackson, also welcomed Dooling's latest decision. "It could be a major step towards winning desegregation of all New York City high schools," he said.

But Board of Education President Steven Aiello and Schools Chancellor Irving Anker have vowed to go "all the way with appeals" against the order.

"What's needed to overcome the racist opposition to desegregation at Andrew Jackson," said Green, "is to build actions such as teach-ins, marches, and demonstrations that can help mobilize broad community and labor support."

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