Revolt in China: The Crisis of Revisionism, Or... Why Mao Tsetung Was Right

By Raymond Lotta

China has been caught up in massive upheaval. Demonstrations led by students erupted in the major cities of the country. Several attempts to remove students from Tiananmen Square failed, and soldiers openly refused orders from their superiors. Workers joined the protest movement in ever larger numbers. Discontent is deep. People from all walks of life are carrying on discussion and debate about the sickness of Chinese society. This revolt not only took the revisionist Communist Party leadership by surprise but also seriously called into question its ability and mandate to rule. Where the movement may go is unclear. The extent to which genuine Marxist-Leninists, upholding Mao Tsetung's banner, may be trying to exert revolutionary influence is also unclear. But this much is certain: Deng Xiaoping's pipe dreams of an obedient population, a stable political environment, and a controllable capitalism have been shattered.

What is happening in China is the product of twelve years of revisionist rule. After the death of Mao Tsetung in 1976, a reactionary coup d'état brought to power a new exploiting class. Since then, China has undergone sweeping changes—in its economy, in its political institutions, in its educational system, in social life, in the values it promotes. These changes have been hailed in the West and in the Soviet bloc as progress. Right there, that should tell us something about the reality of reform. What is described as the restoration of sanity is really the restoration of capitalism. What experts like to describe as a society going through growing pains and searching for political reform is really a society in deep crisis: an economic crisis, a social crisis, and a crisis of confidence in ruling institutions. The purpose of this article is to examine some of the basic characteristics of Chinese society that produced such discontent and what this suggests about the solution to the problems of China under revisionist rule.

I. China Is Not a Socialist Society Capitalism Has Been Restored and China Is Being Reduced to an Oppressed Nation

Profit in command

The Chinese economy is organized around the principle of profit in command. Chinese theoreticians themselves have said that profit provides the most useful measure for economic performance. They have said that competition among enterprises is a good thing since it insures that "only the best survive." In fact, bankruptcies now exist in China. Enterprises are now rewarded for earning greater profits, and more and more investment is now financed by loans rather than by grants. Profit guides the investment of capital. Here is an example. One policy that Mao fought for was to disperse industry throughout the country and to make special efforts to develop the poorer and backward regions. Today, development resources are being concentrated along China's coastal provinces. These have traditionally been more prosperous regions. The idea is to develop an export-oriented economy in these areas. The effect is that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, as investment and financial resources are sucked into high-profit ventures. This is not socialism.

The Situation in Agriculture

Under Mao, China had developed a system of collective agriculture. China's basic food needs were met and enormous social changes took place in the countryside. In 1978, after revolutionary power was overthrown, China adopted the household responsibility system. Fields were broken up into parcels and plots of land were assigned to individual peasant families. A series of directives in 1983 and 1984 allowed individual farm households to hire labor, to buy and own farm machinery, and to market their surpluses in other regions. More efficient households were encouraged to enter into leasing arrangements with less efficient households. In this way land ownership was concentrated in a few hands.

William Hinton has described this process of decentralization: "When the time came to distribute collective assets, people with influence and connections were able to buy, at massive discounts, the tractors, trucks, wells, pumps, processing equipment, and other productive property that the collectives had accumulated over decades through the hard labor of all members. Not only did the buyers manage to set low prices for these capital assets... but they often bought them with easy credit from the state banks... It is doubtful if, in the history of the world, any privileged group ever acquired more for less." What you have in the Chinese
countryside today is a system of modern capitalist commercial farming, often with international linkages, developing alongside a dependent and fragmented poor peasant economy.

China's leaders promote short-term gain. Whatever brings in the most income will supposedly benefit the economy as a whole. "To get rich is glorious," says Deng Xiaoping. This is the capitalist way. And what have been some of the consequences? First, grain production has failed to increase over the last four years. This is because it is more profitable for farmers to grow other cash crops and because the prices of fertilizer, pesticides, and agricultural machinery have risen as a result of declining state investment in agriculture and industries supporting it. China is now importing huge amounts of grain.

Second, there has been tremendous environmental destruction to grasslands and forests, and destruction to drainage and irrigation systems, as cash-oriented farming and herding spread uncontrolled. Third, polarization in the countryside, inheritance practices which split family plots into units too small to farm, and the collapse of collective social services have produced a huge migration of people out of the countryside. By 1988, 50 million peasants had flocked to the major cities. Most of them are not engaged in all-around political life and struggle. They are mere elements in the productive process. In 1984 a "flexible wage system" was introduced, allowing for more wage differentials and bonus payments to get more work out of people. Reforms have also given managers more "freedom of choice" in hiring and firing. In 1985 the government changed the terms under which young workers became employees of state enterprises. This is the labor-contract system. Rather than being hired for life, new workers are hired for a limited length of time. They do not have the same security and welfare benefits as do other workers. In some situations, these contracts are verbal agreements under which workers receive a "floating wage" based on output and profits. The Chinese state no longer guarantees employment.

In the industrial city of Shenyang, 63,000 workers were laid off in 1988; but only 16,000 of them found new jobs during the year. These reforms are sold to people as "freedom of choice"—you can work where you want and when. What's really happening is that the threat of wage reduction, dismissal and unemployment, and a witching of competitive hiring are used as clubs to enforce exploitation. At the same time, a segmented labor force is being consolidated. It is based on growing differences in payment, position, and security and a huge surplus of cheap migrant labor from the rural areas. This is not socialism.

The Situation of Workers in Industry

China's leaders say they want to modernize society. They say the way to do it is to maximize efficiency. And the way to do that is to maximize profits. Anything that raises productivity is just fine. In fact, in a very important speech given in October 1987, Zhao Ziyang, the secretary-general of the Chinese Communist Party, said that the sole criterion for the economy is its level of productivity. This means that the most important thing to the rulers of China is how much they can squeeze out of the workers.

Productivity is boosted by capitalist means. Workers in state industry face strict factory discipline and are subjected to management controls over the organization and performance of work. They are no longer masters of society as they were in revolutionary China; they are not engaged in all-around political life and struggle. They are mere elements in the productive process. In 1984 a "flexible wage system" was introduced, allowing for more wage differentials and bonus payments to get more work out of people. Reforms have also given managers more "freedom of choice" in hiring and firing. In 1985 the government changed the terms under which young workers became employees of state enterprises. This is the labor-contract system. Rather than being hired for life, new workers are hired for a limited length of time. They do not have the same security and welfare benefits as do other workers. In some situations, these contracts are verbal agreements under which workers receive a "floating wage" based on output and profits. The Chinese state no longer guarantees employment.

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Foreign Domination

Deng Xiaoping & Co. have dragged China back into the clutches of the Western powers. When Mao was alive, China was a base area for world revolution. Today China is a sweatshop for imperialism and an unofficial arms dealer for the CIA.

China has received large amounts of foreign capital over the last ten years. Since 1979 China has negotiated $25 billion worth of foreign investment and signed loan agreements worth $47 billion. China's large-scale industrial equipment industries increasingly rely on imported foreign technology. China often has to repay its trade and investment partners with the output of the projects with which they are associated. This is the case with much of the off-shore drilling by foreigners. China must continuously export more to meet its rising import bill. Failing that, it must borrow, and its foreign debt now stands at about $40 billion. The performance of China's economy is very much influenced by its integration into the world economy. High imports in 1984-85

Continued on page 10

"If the Rightists stage an anti-Communist coup d'état in China, I am sure they will know no peace either and their rule will most probably be short-lived, because it will not be tolerated by the revolutionaries who represent the interests of the people making up more than 90 percent of the population."

Mao Tselung, in a letter to his revolutionary comrade and wife, Chenig Chang, 1965

Mass rally in Tiananmen Square during Cultural Revolution.
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Continued from page 9

Investment was out of control: money was going into 20 percent inflation, and there were runs on banks. Industries were neglected. Provinces were competing for raw materials and waging price wars to corner Ul-conceived, get-rich-quick projects, while some basic percent a year. This is quite high. But this growth has markets. There has been a kind of economic warlord-

II. The Current Crisis

The Economy
China's growth rate in the 1980s has averaged about 9 percent a year. This is quite high. But this growth has had a very distorted character. And today the economy is in a state of disarray.

By 1988 the central bank was losing its grip over the money supply and credit. The country was facing 10 and 20 percent inflation, and there were runs on banks. Investment was out of control: money was going into ill-conceived, get-rich-quick projects, while some basic industries were neglected. Provinces were competing for raw materials and wages paid to workers were below the cost of living. Meanwhile, large chunks of Hazard Island, another special economic zone, are being leased to Japan for eighty years.

The Chinese revisionists' program of internal economic reform has at the same time been a program of opening up to foreign capital. But owing to China's historical backwardness, this opening up has led to relations of dependency between the state bureaucratic apparatus and foreign capital, and because of the weakness of China's central structures, foreign capital has been able to strike deals at the provincial levels and play regions and localities against one another. China has once again become a nation oppressed by imperialism.

A Social Cesspool

The counterrevolution in China has affected every sphere of social life. While higher education has been reorganized along elitist Western lines, more than 10 million children have dropped out of primary and middle school. With the return of family farming in the countryside, brutal feudal traditions and practices have made a comeback. In the villages family farming male laborers and beards are valued above the lives and rights of women. Sons are valued more than daughters. Sex, along with private family plots, wine tasting, the persecution of women giving birth to females, and the killing of female babies have reemerged as major social problems.

Crime is on the rise in cities. Robbery, gift-giving, use of family, school, and workplace connections to get jobs or consumer goods in short supply—is this part of the survival and get-ahead game? Poverty in the cities is growing and 20 million peasants in the countryside face famine this year. Meanwhile, party officials openly flaunt their wealth.

In revolutionary China, Mao Tsetung inspired the Chinese people to work for the liberation of all the people of the world. Today the rulers of China are people with a vision of color televisions from Japan for eighty years.

The Chinese Communist Party does not inspire people. As one teacher in Beijing put it, "People members used to be 'the first to hear hardships and the last to take, take, take.' But the problem goes deeper than that. This is a party that has nothing to do with revolution, that has nothing to do with the lofty ideals of communism, with the goal of uniting the working people in a classless society. It extols democracy but is an autocratic institution with feudal-like power centers and is out of reach of mass criticism and transformation. Why should people believe the party? Why should people believe in such a party?"
I. Only Another Socialist Revolution Can Save China

If you want to understand why these things could happen in China, you have to go back to Mao Tsetung. It was Mao who warned of the danger of the capitalist road under socialism. It was Mao who pointed out that people joining the Communist Party only to build a modern, prosperous China would, once in power, develop into a new bourgeoisie. It was Mao who predicted that if the capitalists came to power, they would slavishly submit to imperialism. It was Mao who had worked out a series of policies and principles of socialist planned economy that were designed precisely to avoid the disastrous consequences of what has since come to pass in China. And, most of all, it was Mao who initiated the Cultural Revolution to overthrow the likes of Deng Xiaoping and other new bourgeois forces within the Communist Party who were aiming to restore capitalism. Mao taught revolutionaries everywhere that the revolution doesn't end with but must continue after the seizure of state power.

The only way out of the mess of Chinese society is the reconstruction of the political system. The masses must be reorganized. The tremendous social polarization and order and production, splitting the unity of the people from top to bottom. It is about altering institutions, transforming economic relations. Industry and agriculture must be nationalized. New political institutions of popular democracy must be established. The ideas and values of private gain must be replaced with Mao's principle of "serving the people."

The situation in China is a complex one. A Marxist-Leninist-Maoist party must lead a revolutionary struggle. And they have courageously confronted the regime and restored the capitalist road—conceal the idea of using it to erect a new type of counter-revolutionary activities in transforming socialism into fascism. Force us to add a supplement to the earlier from bourgeois democracy to capitalist rulers, to from capitalist reader to fascist dictator. This is determined by their reactionary character, we have not invented it.□

II. Democracy Has a Class Character

The students in Tiamenm Square have made democracy a major demand of their movement. But there is no mass democracy in the world. The text from a document written by underground Maoists in China in 1961 sheds light on this question. It shows what proletarian democracy meant when China was a revolutionary country. And it shows how the concept of democracy was manipulated by the revisionist leadership of China to suppress the people after Deng Xiaoping & Co. made a coup d'etat and seized power from the revolutionaries in 1976.

"The aim of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was to open up a forum for the people's political expression, to let the people of the whole country, particularly the workers, peasants and revolutionary educated youth freely express themselves, to make them concerned about the central affairs of the Party and state, to promote the Party's mass line, to prevent anyone—especially Party members and cadres—from using their position to seek privileges and self-interest, and further link up with the masses to carry out a determined struggle against bourgeois thinking. This was in order to help the socialist revolution and construction, and further create a political situation where there is both centralism and democracy, both discipline and freedom, both unity of will and personal ease of mind and liveliness. Thus, at the Second Plenum of the Ninth Party Congress, we passed a constitutional amendment to officially guarantee in the highest legal form that 'people have the right to freely express their views through political expression, to let the people of the whole country express their opinions freely, to put on the agenda the problems of interest to the people and to ensure that the government and the apparatus of state power respond to the people's desires."

The students in Tiamenm Square have removed the road of revisionism. The students in Tianenam Square have made democracy a major demand of their movement. But democracy has no future.