

“Whither China?” by Raya Dunayevskaya

Theory/Practice column

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The December 1986 month-long student demonstrations in China brought into the open the present turmoil, but they were neither the cause nor the consequence of what is bringing the crisis to a climax. Behind the infighting within the Communist Party leadership trying to shift the blame for the present crisis from itself to the rank-and-file, there is a great deal more involved than either finding scapegoats, or the “West’s” dogmatic and vulgar glibness about economic “reforms” and political “democracy.”

Clearly, in one respect, it is a question of the succession to Deng Xiaoping which will be on the agenda in the fall when the Thirteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is held. But even that is only a partial answer, for it is not a question of who will follow Deng, but what will follow any successor. To avoid the answer to that type of burning question, Mao Zedong had called the near civil war of the 1971 Lin Biao affair “the great disorder under Heaven.”

There is no doubt that that had been the most serious crisis since winning power, and that the crisis came not from the outside or from capitalist elements within the country, but from within the ruling Communist Party leadership, from the very one Mao had constitutionally designated as his successor (“closest comrade in arms”).

A whole decade has passed since Mao’s death. The disasters of his final decade called the Cultural Revolution have been halted. Yet the “new” world stage he set in motion by rolling the red carpet out for Nixon in 1971 is exactly what happens to national questions in a global world when two nuclear Behemoths are struggling for single world mastery and you do not unfold a truly independent challenge.

THE 1985 YOUTH CHALLENGE TO DENG’S OPENING TO JAPAN AND OTHER STRUGGLES

The Youth have always had a very special role in the Chinese revolutionary movements, and none more important than the 1960s (to which we will return). But to fully understand the ongoing demonstrations in 1986-87, we have to turn to the demonstrations the year before, to the final quarter of 1985. The demonstrations in China in 1985 were not on any youth problems; they were a challenge to Deng’s new policy on Japan. The students read Prime Minister Nakasone’s militaristic visit to the shrine where World War II officers lay buried as signifying the same retrogressionist move as Reagan’s visit to the Bitburg cemetery in Germany, which produced the same type of outcry against this so-called conciliationism with the Nazi-Japanese militarist past. It was a direct challenge to Deng’s deviationism, not only on Japan but globally, and not only on “foreign affairs” but nationally, from the labor/capital relationship at

work (witness the steel workers’ strikes) as well as reflecting the continuing restlessness in the People’s Liberation Army.

That the CCP leadership understood that’s what the students were doing could be seen as early as Oct. 9, 1985, when the Japanese Foreign Minister, Shintaro Abe, arrived in Beijing to discuss the new Peace and Friendship Treaty that had been signed between China and Japan. The Chinese Vice-Premier Li Peng agreed with him that relations between China and Japan were now on an even keel, but nevertheless reminded the Japanese Foreign Minister of all the difficulties that there have been between the two countries.

Indeed, the Japanese news agency Kyodo reported that “Li obliquely blamed” the Japanese government for having caused certain “unstable elements in their relationship.” Since clearly the student demonstrations against Japan continued, it certainly cannot be considered an accident that the CCP official at that moment confirmed that “rapprochement talks were going on between it and the Japanese Communist Party.”¹

At the same time there were contradictory reports (more or less deliberately contradictory) so that the reader didn’t know which one set the direction for the year. Was it, for example, a fact, denied by China, that it and the United States engaged in joint naval maneuvers, or was it a fact that China itself was undergoing great technological and militaristic developments in the Pacific? (See nos. 106 and 107 of the Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation Sections of the China Quarterly.)

FROM MARX TO MAO

To fully understand what 1987 has in store for China in light of what has been developing in the objective situation on one hand and the wrestling with the Mao legacy on the other, we have to turn to 1983. The significance of 1983 rests on the fact that it was both the Marx Centenary Year and the 62nd anniversary of the founding of the CCP.

What is of more immediate importance is Mao Zedong Thought. On Nov. 27, 1981, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party finally passed a resolution entitled, “Mao Zedong’s Historical Role and Mao Zedong Thought.” To prove that though Mao had made “gross mistakes in the ‘Cultural Revolution’...his merits are primary and his errors secondary,” they summarized Mao’s Thought as follows: “Mao made a theo-

1. See the Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation Section of the *China Quarterly*, no. 105, March 1986. Indeed, the Documentation Sections of the magazine from the whole period of October 1985 through September 1986 are important both for military affairs and foreign affairs, with Japan on the one hand and Russia on the other, as well as actual economic developments in the country.

retical synthesis of China's unique experience in its protracted revolution in accordance with the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism...many outstanding leaders of our party made important contributions to the formation and development of Mao Zedong Thought and they are synthesized in the scientific work of comrade Mao."

By 1983 there was a great deal more than just the continuation of Mao's Collected Works. The question was what is that collectivity that produced Mao Zedong Thought? They have now issued the Selected Works of the present-day recognized leaders—Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Deng. Deng is the only one living, the one with the power, the one who is bringing about the most challenges to his own rule. The first who had to fall as these demonstrations reached a climax was his protege, Hu Yaobang.

Let's never forget that youth have a very special role in China in the 20th century. Back in the mid-1960s they even thought that they could use the Cultural Revolution as a point of departure, not just for democracy, but; as they put it, for having a real Paris Commune type of government. That is to say, a communal non-state form of government.²

The Western commentators rushed all too fast to compare the 1986-87 demonstrations to the movement of Democracy Wall. There is no doubt that it was closer to it in time than to 1968, when youth unfurled an altogether new demand in Sheng Wulien's "Whither China?" manifesto that called China the centerpoint of world revolution precisely because it was the point of greatest world contradiction. But the placards for democracy that the 1986-87 demonstrators carried were not just for Democracy Wall, but covered the labor struggles, the arts struggle, the really massive, ongoing opposition to the regime for altogether new human relations.

IS DENG DOING THE OUSTING, OR IS HE BEING OUSTED?

Once, however, the gates were opened to a "collectivity," it was not just a question of Mao or Mao's successors, but the Marx Centenary, and that meant Marx's Humanism. That brought back the old theoretician-propagandist Chou Yang, who in 1957 had unleashed the theoretical fight against Marx's 1844 Humanist Essays;

2. For Sheng Wulien documents see *Philosophy and Revolution* p. 176. A 1982 edition of *Philosophy and Revolution* has a new point of departure in its Introduction with my answer to Prof. George Armstrong Kelly's critique in his *Hegel's Retreat from Eleusis* (Princeton University Press, 1978).

in 1983 he announced that he now welcomed them but perverted them "to include even bourgeois Humanism." At this point, the issue is muddled enough not to know which side of the fighting Chou is on—with the so-called "hardliners" who consider themselves true Marxists, or "reformers" who want to shift from Sinification of Marxism to rejection of it.³

What has happened objectively? The foreign affairs and the theoretical disputes are not the only crises. What is the determinant is the crises at home on the production lines, the poor living conditions and unemployment of the masses, as well as the restlessness in the "technologically reorganized" Army, while seeing the emergence of a new kind of profiteer. This is most evident in the five so-called special economic zones. Recently⁴ the New York Times reported one such area, Shenyang, the industrial capital of Manchuria, which is evidently so high on "reform" that it emboldened one manager to announce that he had cut the work force at his factory from 1,000 to 800, adding, "I've still got 200 people too many."

The 1986 demonstrations only brought to the front the myriad crises that have been boiling up throughout the 1980s as China tried to catch its breath from Mao's last disastrous decade. But China has found that once again it is facing the two nuclear Behemoths and it dare not go to build an independent path. Has Deng, as well as "hardliners" and "softliners," given up hope that there is an independent Third World that would lead to independence from both Russia and the U.S.?

Integral to that is the international question: where to globally? Had one merely to choose between U.S. and Russia? Was Russia really enemy number one, so that Reagan could consider China his card? The latest thing that China was very quick about denying was the Kyodo news account that China and the U.S. were participating in joint naval maneuvers. China said: absolutely no; they were just "exchanging greetings." Somebody's head will roll. Will it be Deng's?

3. This is not the place to work out Mao Zedong Thought as he tried transforming his substitution of guerrilla warfare for proletarian revolution into a new universal. First was the Great Leap Forward. This was followed by the challenge to Russia as head of the international Communist movement. By the mid-1960s we were witness to the great disasters which Mao called the Cultural Revolution (1966-71), which was the Great Substitution for Marx's revolution-in-permanence. See the two chapters "The Challenge of Mao Tse-tung" and "Cultural Revolution or Maoist Reaction?" in my *Marxism and Freedom* (1982 ed.), and as well "Post-Mao China: What Now?" in my *New Essays* (1977).

4. See *New York Times* Jan. 30, 1987.