

Deng revises not so much Mao, as Marx

Theory/Practice column

News & Letters, August-September 1981

The 35,000-word document: "Certain Questions on the History of Our Party,"¹ is a rewrite of the entire history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), whether we begin at its founding in 1921, at its concentration point since the gaining of power in 1949; or at its most extensive period—the "Cultural Revolution"—to which the Resolution devotes 19 of the 29 pages. This is just as clearly seen when the New China News Agency officially summarized it in 5,000 words issued to the world press.² In both cases, objective history seems to have been completely eliminated as if the history of the CCP occurred in a vacuum. Thus, there is not a single mention of the Vietnam War, and although, if you look very hard, you might find a reference to Korea, it is mentioned in such a way that U.S. imperialism is certainly not the Enemy Number One it was then. One thing, however, is never referred to at all in the excerpts but is the centerpoint of the theoretical revisionism beyond Mao. That is a direct attack on Marx.

The first thing to be noted is that the new revision occurs in the section, "The Decade of the 'Cultural Revolution,'" and comes after the "Cultural Revolution" is said to have conformed "neither to Marxist-Leninism, nor to Chinese reality," and is judged to have "negated many of the correct principles, policies and achievements of the 17 years after the founding of the People's Republic." Every ill is blamed on the Cultural Revolution after it has been made clear that though the "Gang of Four" had taken advantage of it, it was nevertheless Mao, himself, who developed it. Yet, after all these exposes of its 'anti-Marxism,' we are suddenly brought to nothing short of "historical causes underlying the 'Cultural Revolution,'" and find that there seems to be "a 'theoretical basis' in the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin."

'TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS WORK'

Once the cat is out of the bag, it turns out, in the tracing of this "theoretical basis," that it is Marx alone who is responsible since it is claimed that he used the expression, "bourgeois right" when referring to "the distribution of the means of consumption in a socialist society" so that the principle of "to each according to his work" led us to regard the error in magnifying the class struggle as an act in defense of the purity of Marxism."

Let us make clear, first, that the phrase, "to each according to his work," is no expression of Marx's. It is what Stalin, and what Mao, following Stalin, revised as the workers' state became transformed into its opposite, a state-capitalist society. It was then that Marx's magnificent vision of a class-less society, articulated as

"from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" became transformed into the capitalistic "according to his labor," and "labor" was further spelled out as capitalistic wages—preferably for piece work.

Secondly, the expression "bourgeois right" is deliberately taken out of context (à la Stalin and Mao) from Marx's great work, *The Critique of the Gotha Program*, without any direct reference ever being made to it. Instead, a jump is made to the "inner-Party struggles" in China which they claim resulted "in magnifying class struggle as an act in defense of the purity of Marxism." But Marx's Critique was stressing how long inequality—"bourgeois right"—would persist in the scars we would carry over from bourgeois society when capitalism was first overthrown. Far from having any relation to "inner-Party struggles," Marx was warning the German Workers Unity Party that if we ever lose our goal of a class-less society, we will never reach it.

That is exactly what happened both in Stalin's Russia and in Mao's China. All this Deng Xiaoping is attributing to the "Cultural Revolution," is making sure at the same time that the alleged Left policies of exaggeration of the class struggles in "socialist" China are blamed on Marx having wrongly designated "the distribution of the means of consumption" in a supposedly socialist society as "bourgeois right."

After these "errors," the Resolution's assessment of Mao's "Historical Role and Mao Zedong Thought" remains great, with emphasis that it is to remain the distinctively Chinese Thought to be followed. The periods in which he remains so great and wrote "Oppose Book Worship" are precisely when Mao, let us not forget, was so busy Sinifying Stalinized "Marxism" as to declare that: "There are people that think that Marxism can cure any disease. We should tell them that dogmas are more useless than cow dung. Dung can be used as fertilizer."

MAO, LIN AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

There has been, of course, some deMaoization; the "Cultural Revolution" has definitely been totally discredited and those it had designated as "capitalist-roadsters" have been brought back to power. But we must not forget that, far from the "Cultural Revolution" having lasted a whole decade from 1966 to 1976, as the document claims, it had run its course by 1968. And it was Mao and Lin Biao who destroyed it.

For that, Lin was rewarded by being designated as Mao's successor. Nothing short of constitutionalizing that feudal act was achieved at the 1969 Congress. It was in 1971, when Mao extended the invitation to Nixon and prepared to roll the red carpet out for him, that Mao and Lin became enemies. There is no doubt that

1. See *Peking Review*, No. 27, July 6, 1981.

2. These excerpts were published in *The New York Times*, July 1, 1981.

Lin's opposition to having the red carpet rolled out for Nixon is what brought about his death. And there is no doubt that the extreme crisis in the country brought Deng back into power, with Mao's help.

But the deMaoization recognized by bourgeois ideologues misses the fact that the present Chinese rulers are all Stalinist-Maoists and, just as it isn't a question only of modernization vs. Islam in Iran, so it isn't modernization vs. the "wild 'Cultural Revolution'" in China.

The over-riding truth is that there is no independent road between ruling class and oppressed class, whether that characterizes private capitalism or state capitalism—not just the state-capitalism of Russia, or China, but the so-called private capitalism of the USA—that is, multi-national, corporate, private monopoly capitalism. The latter type characterized by state intervention called the "welfare state" came on the global scene when the Depression put an end to "pure" private capitalism. It was World

War II that then extended state-capitalism, adding neo-colonialism to this imperialist nature.³

Like private capitalism, Chinese state-capitalism is suffering from what the Chinese like to refer to as "great troubles under heaven." That is to say, ceaseless class struggle. Deng may feel confident that, now that he has destroyed "Democracy Wall" and arrested the new youth leaders, the youth will peacefully co-exist with him. The truth is he has not destroyed them; he has only driven them underground.

3. An ironic proof of that appeared in the recent book, *Theories of Imperialism*, by Wolfgang J. Mommsen, which attempts "eruditely" to move away from Marxist theories on the ground that Marx was allegedly "Eurocentric" and therefore didn't see neo-colonialism; in fact, didn't see imperialism "because" he was sticking strictly to *Accumulation of Capital*. In the end, however, Mommsen was forced to conclude: "Nevertheless it remains the task of scholars to seek theoretical models which will make it possible to interpret this important phase of history (imperialist expansion) which still to a large extent determines the condition of our present-day world."